

WORKING-CLASS WRITING, PUBLISHING AND EDUCATION:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF THREE 'MOMENTS'

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the work and experience of working-class writers in three 'moments' and the contexts in which their writing has been produced and published. A class asymmetry of access to writing and publishing is seen to characterise all three 'moments', disadvantaging working-class people, and to explain a corpus of work that, because it remains largely obscure, both surprises the student by its extent while at the same time remaining relatively modest in quantity. The processes of writing and publishing receive increasing attention and come to be seen as powerfully educational for participants. This by-product educational strand of (especially recent) working-class writing and publishing is set within a tradition of working-class collective self-education and its success set against a pattern of provided schooling that typically has failed (in both senses) working-class students.

The Introduction sets out the origins and development of the study; explores some of the key terms of the title; expounds the structure of ideas; presents an 'overview'; and explains the research activities and 'case-study' approach developed.

Part I explores a 'first moment of working-class writing': roughly the first half of the nineteenth century. Poetry and prose-autobiography are considered with special attention to a particular cluster of texts and to the precursors and contexts of writers and writings.

Part II investigates a 'second moment' which began around 1930, climaxed in the three or four years before the outbreak of World War II

and had ended by 1945. The approach here is by means of two 'case-studies' and a brief 'overview' that refers to parallels and contrasts in contemporaneous developments in France.

At the climax of the study Part III explores the context and developments of community-publishing and working-class writing since 1971.

This phase of the dissertation draws on study of some three hundred publications and of the origins and processes of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) and its constituent groups. Additionally, attention is paid to such overlapping developments as History Workshop and the Oral History Society.

A brief consideration of publications arising in pit communities from the Miners' Strike, 1984-1985, is used to draw together (Conclusion) and underline the main arguments of the study.

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One

INTRODUCTION

"Take away all that the working class has given  
to English Literature and that literature would  
scarcely suffer..."

Virginia Woolf, 1940

This study explores the work and experience of working-class writers in three historical 'moments' and the contexts in which their writing has been produced and published. Among the important issues that arise especial and increasing attention is drawn to the processes of writing and publication. These come to be seen as powerfully educational for the participants and suggestive for the whole project of working-class education. It is further suggested that they are fruitfully seen in the context of a tradition of working-class collective self-education whose features are, through the work of historians, archivists and students of working-class culture, language and politics, coming to be understood.

#### The study: origins

"Producing books with the active participation of local people, thereby refusing to regard the same people as an undifferentiated mass".

Ken Worpole (1977a, 15).

My attention was originally drawn to post-1971 community-published working-class writing as to 'a kick against' working-class people being seen amorphously as "masses" (Williams, 1958, 289), "mobs", "dangerous and threatening classes", or (most notoriously) as a "swinish multitude". As has been observed (Himmelfarb, 1984), if multitudes remain voiceless they are likely to be seen as such. Working-class people have overwhelmingly been represented, misrepresented and "written" by others; their subjective realities have been ignored in arranging provision for them; and they have, historically, tended to be visible only when in

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 -revolt. Hence it seemed immediately important that within community publishing initiatives they were instead becoming 'subjects', finding voices of their own and acquiring both the means of publication and a

readership. The self-portrayal of working class people and working-class culture - both typically travestied, parodied, patronised (where not 'invisible' altogether) - had it seemed begun: working-class people were taking possession of, and gathering pride in, a history of collective (especially institutional) creativity and seeing themselves as acting as well as acted upon, as makers as well as consumers.

In a preliminary study (Gregory, 1979) I attempted to categorise a sample of texts and the most prominent community publishing groups then at work. Working from a distance and drawing chiefly on primary (community-published) material I explored such issues as the kinds (including genres) of writing that were emerging (eg. poetry and prose autobiography and reminiscence), and the dominant themes represented (eg working-class work experience). In addition, in considering such issues as the interplay between particularity and generalisation in published texts; the implications of new structures of publishing which by-passed 'gatekeepers', which deconstructed the idea of 'author' and which allowed new (eg tape/transcript) ways of making texts and new (or perhaps recovered) holistic patterns of production, I began to develop an enquiry into processes alongside that into products.

As part of the preliminary study I explored some of these questions with among others the late Charles Parker, known best for his pioneering Radio Ballad form of oral documentary (Gregory, 1979, 192-214). In addition I interviewed Chris Searle and Ken Worpole: key 'insider' figures in the origins and evolution of community publishing (Gregory, 1979, 215-235; 159-183). From this experience, especially, dawned

my awareness of the potentially powerful self-educational dimension for participants of community publishing experience, a realisation crucial to the genesis of the present study. The initial impetus came from interest in a cluster of such complex questions as the following:

- 1     What cultural significance lay in the new availability to working-class people of means of publication historically dominated by non working-class writers and readers?
- 2     What has been involved in the shift from a situation where, on the one hand, access to writing - or at least to the full range of writerly activity - has been denied to working-class people and where, on the other, the modality of writing itself has been historically and decisively dominated by standard language, and hence by non working-class writers and readers?
- 3     What conventional speech/writing boundaries are called into question given that the shift referred to has involved the appearance in print of nonstandard language, much arising from talk/transcript origins? (Nonstandard language in print is a rare phenomenon if one excludes attempts - in plays, short stories and novels, and as we shall see in some working-class autobiographies - to render (and place) the speech of working-class 'characters' by means of what Raymond Williams has called (Williams, 1983c, 217) the "orthography of the uneducated".)
- 4     What has been the experience of, and the effect of it on, working-class people moving from what may be characterised as a 'primary'

(low-level, 'secretarial') literacy to a 'secondary' ('authorial': writing for a range of purposes, readerships, etc) literacy

(cp Smith, 1982, Ch 3), especially in the light of analyses which have portrayed such moves in terms of the development of communication with the self, of the materialisation of language and of a disembedding of thought that promotes awareness of both what is known and how it is known?

- 5 How may the contrast be accounted for between, on the one hand, the palpable sense of excitement and growth conveyed by 'first-time' working-class writers in community publishing contexts becoming committed to writing as an indispensable way of life (unmotivated by financial gain) and, on the other, their former sense of inadequacy as writers and alienation from writing itself, bequeathed by provided schooling? How far had they been 'made' by negative, often long-worn institutionally-conferred labels, and how far had they always and/or recently cast them off? How did they now, from new vantage points, view the original outcomes of schooling as set against recent experiences?
- 6 What can be learned of, and from, the processes and trajectories of the community-publishing groups that have generated such developments, institutional and personal, and from that of their national grouping, the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP)?
- 7 What are the historical origins of community publishing and how does its evolution relate to contiguous and overlapping developments such

as in oral history and History Workshop;

community politics and community education; adult literacy

initiatives, and so on?

With a shift of attention towards writers and publishing processes,

the genesis and the main focus of the study has been, then, an

interest in developments in community-published and working-class

writing since 1971. The origins and nature of these developments

have been explored in detail elsewhere (Evans in Thompson, J L 1980;

FWWCP, 1978; Gregory 1979, 1980, 1984a, 1984b; Morley & Worpole,

1982; Worpole, 1977a) and are briefly rehearsed in Part III below.

As understanding grew of initiatives post-1971 the need also grew

to know more of earlier working-class writing and publishing -

initially so as to establish what was novel about recent developments;

more fundamentally so as to 'place' recent developments within an

historical trajectory: to introduce a diachronic perspective;

and as a means of enquiry into a further set of questions:

- 8 Why is there relatively so little working-class writing? How does what there is relate to other writing arising from dominant cultures? What are appropriate terms for its description and analysis? What happens to it: among readers and in historical terms?
- 9 What were the conditions of publication of working-class writing at other periods? What was characteristic of the lived experience of earlier working-class writers and what relationships can be drawn between the work, conditions and experience of working-class



writers across stretches of time?

- 10 What light is cast on such questions by enquiry into developments in working-class writing and publishing in other countries?

### Three 'moments'

The more I read the faster receded any possibility of achieving comprehensive coverage - and with my sense of the volume of extant working class writing came a sense of the scale of its neglect. As with Ruth and Eddie Frow, distinguished collectors of the literature of working-class history and the working-class movement, it became necessary to specialise.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, two earlier periods - roughly the early nineteenth century and the 1930s - began to emerge as salient in respect of working-class writing and publication within the sweep of time embracing the existence of the working-class (Thompson, 1963). These periods, identified more exactly at appropriate points below, became the three 'moments' whose exploration provides a major structural dimension of the study.

It is clear from the outset that much fine and significant working-class writing is ruled out by this structural decision: the work, for example, of Tommy Armstrong, Thomas Frost, Thomas Cooper, William Lovett, Alfred Williams - and Robert Tressell. However, as 'moments' of special coherence, importance, vitality and significant historical conjuncture the two (unequally long) earlier periods, taken together with the years -since 1971, repay attention and justify special study. All three 'moments', as will be suggested below, emerge as salient also in respect

of working-class writing in France; the second 'moment' also in the USA; and the third also in both the USA and in Western Europe. Speculatively, it seems likely that further study might confirm these as the three key 'moments' of working-class writing.

'Class', Working Class'

"It is notorious that "Class" today is a place of extraordinary confusions, in which rival practitioners deploy ideological, heuristic, instrumental, structural, statistical and plainly pejorative (but masked) definitions... It is true that class can be transactional. Class may not only be idea but powerful ideological force. But because class is these things it does not follow that it has no real historical reference. Can it not be both idea and social force (in the sense of relationship), just as nationalism and racism are? One cannot dismiss, with a wave of a definitional wand, the imperative pressures and the palpable evidences which scholars have sought to explain; the juridical, economic, cultural, political, institutional evidences of persons relating to each other in class ways."

E P Thompson<sup>4</sup>

"...just because (class) cannot be precisely defined according to the rules of analytic philosophy does not mean that it cannot refer to something real."

Jon Cook<sup>5</sup>

The problems of defining, demarcating and sub-dividing (eg skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled-~~man~~ual) classes and allocating people to them are notorious. They are perhaps especially acute now when cultural patterns - of work and unemployment, life-style, values, attitudes, status, etc - are in transformation as radical as during the first Industrial Revolution (Williams, 1983b), and when middle-class appropriation ~~of~~ working-class institutional forms is endemic.

Yet, for all the assertions that "we are all working-class now",

despite what has been called a "Marks and Spencer revolution"<sup>6</sup> which has left us all wearing the same clothes - a surface transformation of appearance belying deep-structural continuities in reality - class as process; class, crucially, as differential relationship to the means of production; class as both function and determinant of differential wealth, power and influence - economic, industrial, social, political - class as objectively real is hardly deniable in the Britain of the 1980s.

"The word 'class'," as Gareth Stedman-Jones has argued (1983, 2)

"has acted as a congested point of intersection between many competing, overlapping or simply differing forms of discourse - political, economic, religious and cultural - right across the political spectrum ... (and) however we define it, has formed an inescapable component of any discussion of the course of English politics and society since the 1830s."

Paraphrasing Stedman-Jones, Tom Nairn writes of 'class' as

"an archaism supposedly always on the retreat which gets through each new door before us and rearranges the furniture more comfortably, waiting calmly until the bavardage about change subsides once more."<sup>7</sup>

### Working-class writers

Those who are consistently allocated to the category "working-class writers" include individuals who in terms of some of the widely used multiple criteria (including nature of work and life-style) present difficulties and invite objections. Bernard Sharratt (1982, 237), in his admirable study of some "nineteenth-century working-class political autobiographies" makes use of the yardstick "autobiographies by people more immediately associated with a working-class background than with any

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other social position and connected at some stage with some form of political event or movement" and includes 'first moment' writers who

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became, for a time at least, literary professionals.

Aristocrat and barrister Chartist Ernest Jones is often corralled, at least by implication, into the category 'working-class'; work on 'Nineteenth Century Working-Class Autobiography'<sup>11</sup> (1981) includes many writers who, on application of the strictest criteria, might count as ex-working-class ("anciens prolétaires" - Ragon, 1974, 13) or, in later life, intermittently working class!

The foregoing remarks do not of course herald the announcement of a solution of class demarcation disputes. If in an area as difficult as this it were possible to produce definitive criteria then still the problem of gathering enough information on each writer to make a sure allocation would remain: impertinent and absurd in the case of living writers; often impossible in respect of the dead. In fact the work considered in the present study helps compound the difficulties: for example, portrayals of class cultural experience (eg Ron Barnes's perception of 'rough' and 'posh' ends of his boyhood streets, his (extended) family - and perhaps (internalised) of himself) signals more complexity and the need ~~for~~ more subtle description and analysis.<sup>12</sup> The 'way forward' lies elsewhere.

The interest of this study is centrally in those who have written from within continuing working-class experience, i.e. rather in 'writing workers' than in 'worker writers'. Ex-working-class men and women reflecting on a receding working-class past are by and large not included (though each case is complex and some inclusions are certainly debatable). In general, agonising over decisions to include/exclude (on the basis of what are often ultimately inert definitions) has not been given

high priority; the intention is to stake out a territory of interest rather than to offer confident demarcation. Furthermore in Part III (post-1971) the interest of the study is as much in community-publishing as in working-class writing.

#### Research approach

The process of making this study has been of 'progressive focussing' within a loose framework developed at the outset and has involved a blend of research activities (outlined below). Choice of an 'open-ended' approach, sufficiently flexible and reactive to follow unanticipated lines of enquiry and to respond to 'events', has allowed, for example, attention to literary 'roots' pre-1800 (Part I) - as a sense grew of their explanatory power; to nineteenth century working-class educational history that unexpectedly illuminated late twentieth century developments; and to suggestive publishing developments in the Miners Strike 1984-1985 (Conclusion) - events unfolding as the study was being written.

The characterization of three 'moments' grew from the most tentative of hypotheses. Gradually this took shape as a diachronic means to enrich enquiry into such fundamental issues as the impact of moves into writing and 'secondary literacy'; the interface between nonstandard working-class orality and a written modality inflected towards 'standard' forms; the implications of differential class access to active literacy and differential attitudes to and assumptions about the uses of literacy; the determinations of varying publishing contexts - all this going

beyond what an exclusive (synchronic) attention to recent and contemporary developments could afford. Again, an initial sense of the intrinsic value to participants of the total processes of community-publishing activity strengthened rapidly in the earliest stages of the research to conviction, and subsequent development in this dimension of the study has consisted in the consolidation and refinement of its evocation and analysis. The same 'trajectory' - rapid growth, slow enrichment - characterised my progressive understanding of the nature and processes of the FWWCP and member groups and the developing hypothesis that the collective self-educational strand of their activities is properly and perhaps best understood as part of a tradition of working-class self-educational initiatives.

#### Case Studies

Study of each 'moment' proceeds by (inductive/deductive) means of case studies - detailed, close-up explorations of particular texts and their authors - pursued in the context of, and interacting with, broad-based survey. The case studies once made are used in different ways - eg presented in Part Two, plundered in Part Three - as the means of characterising each 'moment'; of exploring the detail of lived experience and the themes of the study within the contours of three working-class writing and publishing contexts. The general principle followed is that the issues of the study should be identified and explored chiefly through the texts and texture of experience of individual working-class writers and, later, groups.

In what follows I outline the three parts of the study so as to

establish the approach adopted and to introduce the arguments developed.

### Part I

First are sketched two antecedent traditions - the one a centuries-long and at times obscure line of 'uneducated poets' published chiefly through the support of patrons (at first individual, later collective - i.e. through subscription); the other a newer tradition of prose spiritual autobiography. Then, against a background of Edward Thompson's portrayal and analysis of the 'making of the working class', and the historical context more generally, a 'first moment' of working class writing and publishing is identified and characterised. The task of characterisation starts from the earlier poetry and prose traditions referred to. It involves first a threefold categorisation of working-class poetry in terms of (1) a development of the 'uneducated poet' tradition; (2) industrial poetry and song with particular reference to the dominant manifestations in the textile and coal industries; and (3) political (especially Chartist) poetry.

Just as orientation to the working-class poetry and song of this 'first moment' is assisted by reference to such secondary sources as Williams (1973), Vicinus (1974) and Hollingworth (1977) so orientation to the prose autobiography of the same period is especially indebted to the work of in particular David Vincent (1981), Richard Altick (1957) - and Bernard Sharratt (1973, 1982). From such texts it was possible to sketch-map the early nineteenth century working-class autobiographical terrain and bring into sharp focus a cluster of key texts in accordance

with the case study approach outlined above. These become the means of exploring the circumstances of writers, writing and publication; purposes, approaches and target readerships; themes, language issues, etc. . .

## Part II

The approach here, in contrast, is to present extensive and formally contrasted case studies of the work and experience of two working-class writers. The first - Herbert Hodge, taxi driver - follows chronology as an organizing principle so as to highlight the interaction of work and experience and their context; the second - B L Coombes, miner - uses an analytical structure to explore potentially generalisable features of the context of the 'second moment'. These chapters are developed in the light of reading extensively into other contemporary working-class writing (which figures in references, comparisons, contrasts etc within the text, and in notes and appendices).

The attempt is made on the one hand to evoke the dominant forms and conditions of working-class publishing: eg prose autobiography, prose (as well as cinema and radio) documentary, poetry and fiction generated within a range of Left, middle-class dominated projects; Left theatre; union journalism etc and to add to a developing portrayal of the conditions of working-class writing, involving decisively the interventions of new kinds of 'gatekeeper' patrons. On the other hand I seek to offer a detailed exploration of the lived experience of working-class writers, drawing almost exclusively on primary sources. Within these enterprises the kinds of questions announced at the outset come into sharper focus.

Hodge and Coombes are seen as mutually comparable in such respects



as the following:

- 1 As minimally-educated men striving to make themselves as writers in a sense that included the wish to be seen and rewarded as such.
- 2 As gathering confidence and stability to the point of coming to theorise in print their predicament as working-class writers.
- 3 As simultaneously both enabled and constrained by, and exploiting and accommodating to, the conditions of publication - with for example Coombes coming to be seen as accommodating a fictional disposition within documentary projects.
- 4 As both able to make the prerequisite assumptions about the nature and making of culture in general and of literary culture in particular that seemed prerequisite to publication at the time.

As being in a tense and contradictory relationship with the ambient working-class culture and colleagues: facing inward and outward at once; simultaneously seeking and resisting identification with working-class people en masse - a predicament figured especially in their deployment of standard and nonstandard language, and caught in Victor Turner's (1969) formulation 'liminality': ie "being on the threshold, in no-man's-land, between clear social identities"(Martin,1981,50).

Hodge and Coombes, contrasting sharply in their cultural provenance, are seen also in contrast on issues of working-class writing development: Coombes tending to accept the 'agenda' and authority of the dominant culture (eg on literary questions); Hodge hinting at ways forward rooted in working-class culture and language formation.

### Part III

In Part III I explore first the origins and historical contexts of the development of working-class writing and community-publishing groups. Developments since 1971 are seen as part of a wider growth

of "desubordination", of collective self-help initiatives born out of dissatisfaction with imposed solutions, and of new emerging relationships between class, communication and the making of communities. A diversity of group orientations and processes is considered alongside an essential homogeneity of group aims: eg in respect of redressing class-historical imbalances of access to writing and print and towards working-class confident self-expression. The nature, purposes and activities of the FWWCP are explored as well as a selection of its debates ('working-class or socialist?'; 'working-class writers, middle class managers') and some of the tensions signalled by its name. Community-publishing orientations are seen as subversive of settled distinctions and relationships - eg writer/publisher, publisher/reader, reader/writer - and also of that between 'literature' (and literary language) and what people at large may want to say and write and how they may want to say and write.

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The theme of subversion of tradition informs also a consideration of the development of two 'convergent' institutional developments - History Workshop and the Oral History Society - whose alternative democratising historical practices have paid new respect to the experience and testimony of working-class people and their nonstandard language and which thus mesh with the dominant concerns of this study. In considering this 'people's history' strand of working-class writing and community publishing in the 'third moment' I touch on the status of reminiscence within historical projects - especially the relationship between and importance attached to, respectively, 'objective

facts' and subjective meanings. I consider, also, tendencies to deconstruct the professional/institutional role of the historian; historians' characteristic suspicions of oral evidence (a scepticism which often ignores the oral origins of more 'reliable' written material and fails to treat as problematic its class-asymmetrical survival amid a general pattern of loss and destruction); and the problematic of 'experience' vis-a-vis 'history' and 'theory'.

'People's history' is seen as operating within a loose theoretical framework both governing and developed by the articulation of experience rather than within a straitjacket of 'correct', developed theory "unchecked by the facts" or by people's perceptions of "lived experience".

The latter orientation has been described as the "mode of the long revolution". It involves working-class people in association being seen as benefiting from experiences shared within groups and through publications: as coming both to understand their shared circumstances and to move into political action. In this context consideration of an FWWCP debate around the charge of 'nostalgia' in respect of some community publications gives rise to an embryonic theory of reading them: stressing the need always to understand the contexts of their production and distribution - eg some arising from community action; others giving rise to it. What may be read as nostalgia is shown as having in recorded cases enabled an enhanced understanding of the present and as having stimulated community activism for recovery and change. Again, knowledge of the context of publication policies is seen as fundamental to reading community-published poetry. Understanding a view of publi-

cation as far less irrevocable and of texts as far less authoritative and dignified than is conventionally the case, and understanding that published poetry is often conceived with performance in mind, is seen as decisive to their proper reception and appraisal.

A survey of three hundred or so community publications (including some twenty-five 'performances') suggests, with respect to Moments I and II, both continuities and shifts of emphasis. Exploration of themes suggests such major categories as home life, relationships within the working-class community and with 'outsiders', working-class work, the experiences of women and minorities - and the impact of schooling. The dominant impression of the institutions of schooling is of their providing an experience nasty, brutish and short, while, in contrast individual teachers (usually one per working-class autobiographer) are celebrated for their passionate commitment to their pupils.

While the categories prose reminiscence/autobiography and poetry are seen to have remained dominant in Moment III there has been a proliferation of new forms of publication. The most significant broad developments identified are collectivity of authorship, production and distribution; and, formally, the appearance of collective, multi-voice, often 'dialogic' autobiography. Group publishing policies are shown as having typically generated autobiographies of 'ordinary', 'unremarkable' and 'representative' men and women. This new emphasis is contrasted with the pattern of mainstream-published working-class autobiographies in Moment II and, especially Moment I.

Portrayal of the third moment suggests a new confidence in and willingness to publish working-class nonstandard language, a point of striking contrast with earlier moments. This is seen as both a considerable gain and as in collision with settled cultural attitudes and assumptions, on the part of authors as well as of readers. This development is bound up with other new departures: the deconstruction of oral/written, form/content distinctions implicit in the tape/transcript/publication sequence (technologically-enabled though not technologically-determined) and in transacting in print what has normally been restricted to speech.

In Chapters 9 and 10 attention is turned from texts and contexts to working-class writers and to such central issues of the study as the radical importance to participants of the shift into writing/publishing; the significance as collective self-education of that shift within community publishing experience; and the location of such developments within a tradition of working-class self-education.

Writing and print are explored critically in terms of, on the one hand, the potential potency of their addition to orality and their transforming effects on consciousness; and on the other, in terms of class asymmetries of access to and control of writing and print which tend to divide producers from consumers, participants from spectators. The shifts of many working-class community-published writers from a passive, minimal 'primary' literacy to an active, reconstructed 'secondary' literacy is explored in the context of the characterisation of literacy-

in-culture referred to above and drawing upon the case studies conducted. Such moves are seen as constituting decisive benefits for the participants, and as a challenge to dominant relations and practices of writing/publishing in our culture.

Case studies are drawn on to suggest patterns both of transformation of experience into inspectable, criticisable knowledge and of fresh perceptions of the processes, potential and social positioning of writing itself - with some attention besides to a therapeutic dimension of writing practices. The complex social outcomes of the shift into writing/print within working-class communities are seen as of a piece with those noted in the experience of working-class writers in Moments I and II.

On the basis of case-study material, portrayal of community-publishing group activities suggests a stark contrast with experiences of schooling which at best had frozen writing development, putting it into cold storage till the new experiences under consideration brought thaw and fresh growth - a growth not without its measure of social pain. The writing development suggested is seen as qualitatively distinct from much school writing experience: as closely related to "lived experience", purposeful, often collaborative, involving genuine communication with a potentially wide readership and exploiting a wide range of writerly potential.

The processes described are further seen as projects of both community education and working-class education. The former label is seen as suggestive of an education 'of, by, with, about and for' the community and inextricably bound up with action for community transformation. Use

of the latter label presupposes a democratic, collaborative, "pedagogy of the oppressed" (Freire, 1970), the development of a "spearhead knowledge" that is "really useful" (Johnson, 1979) in the context of working-class struggle.

The entire educational project implicit in developments in the third moment is seen, finally, as within a tradition of working-class collective self-education whose origins and early manifestations (eg. mutual improvement societies, private venture schools, socialist Sunday schools) are sketched in the context of their appropriation and incorporation within education-provided-for-the-working-class and transformation from an original collectively-based to a subsequent individual-based enterprise.

Recent developments as portrayed are seen as embodying key-principles of working-class education and forcing themselves onto the agenda of the working-class educational project.

### Conclusion

Finally the community publications of the 1984-1985 Pit Strike - and their contexts of production and distribution - are explored as pointing up and clustering together many of the central concerns of the study: eg collective self-help and self-representation as against 'solutions' and misrepresentation from outside; self development in respect of class, community and communication. As in both earlier 'moments' - and within working-class writing and publishing in general - the vital class experience of mining communities generate trailblazing, unignorablely important work; the processes of generation and distribution suggest a microcosm of third moment community publishing activity and its importance

to participants and at the same time bear relation to earlier activities (eg in 1926; among nineteenth century pitmen poets; around union publications). Traditional features of (especially) pit poetry are in evidence; eg economy; closeness to idiomatic speech; humour; ballad and other narrative forms. A major difference from earlier work is seen in the new kinds of agency, self-representing subjectivity and growth-in-collectivity of working-class pit community women.

In a final stocktaking, parallels are drawn between the 'moments' in respect of:

- 1 The surprising amount of working-class writing produced and published in each and the range of 'channels' of publication available to working-class writers.
- 2 The dominant forms essayed.
- 3 The tendency of interest in working-class writers to be founded on their typicality/representativeness rather than on the appeal of their individuality.
- 4 All three moments being times of convulsive social change leading to working-class people wanting to put things on record while it was still possible to do so and to (typically uneasy) 'outsiders' taking a close interest in working-class experience and views reported from the  
14  
'no go' areas of the great cities.
- 5 The role of (changing patterns of) patronage.
- 6- Working-class writers finding means of communicating in the interstices of various kinds of legitimated provision.
- 7 The contempt of establishment critics.



Contrasts are suggested in respect of:

- 1 Broad patterns of centralisation (second moment) and a measure of decentralisation (first and third).
- 2 Widespread rejection in the post-1971 work of dominant literary authorities and assumptions; of norms of individualism in favour of collaborativeness; of divisions of labour in book production in favour of a new (or recovered) holism.
- 3 A new confidence in the third moment in the distinctive (collective, institutional) achievements of working-class culture; in the value of recording in print ordinary, unexceptional experience; in nonstandard language as a medium of written expression and communication; and in the idea of every(wo)man as a potential, publishable writer.
- 4 A tendency for much recent work to be more radicalising than gentling in its orientation and for community publishing experience to contrast sharply and favourably with schooling experience; for its holism of participation to illuminate for participants the nature of published texts in general; for it to provide models of successful adult working-class educational practice ripe for appropriation by mainstream educators: the fate of so many creative working-class institutional achievements in the past.

#### Overview

Hence of Part I of the study the intentions are three: that it offers in outline an original overall anatomisation of working-class writing, both poetry and prose, of the 'first moment' where previous scholarship has tended to specialise in particular categories; second,

that it offers the first of two 'moment' portrayals (with an attempt to suggest antecedents) to be set beside that of my starting-point: developments since 1971: third, it raises some of the central themes to be pursued through the study. The means employed are tilted towards 'wide-angle' survey with light use of small-scale case studies and examples: eg Jones, Clare ; Dodd, Manby Smith; Burn, Bezer; textile and mining communities. The categories and generalizations suggested are offered hypothetically and, as it were, heuristically.

In Part II two major case-studies (with calculatedly digressive structure) are presented. The work and experience of two men are explored as both of intrinsic importance and as the means of characterising the working-class writing/publishing context of the 'second moment', with special salience given to the publishing channel represented by union journals. Themes introduced in Part I are developed, added to and carried forward to Part III, including in a coda sketching parallels and contrasts with contemporaneous developments in France.

Part III draws on a comprehensive survey and : makes use of - though does not present as set-pieces - case-studies based on reading, observation, correspondence and interview (see below). Treatment of the 'third moment' is fullest to the degree that, self-evidently, the 'data' is richest. However, an important distinction needs to be made: that only 'community published' writers and writing are included. As this means excluding recent working-class writers/writing published in the 'main-stream'<sup>15</sup> (as has been the case with many forerunners and much work in

the earlier 'moments' and at other times), then while continuities and discontinuities emerge from the juxtaposition of the 'moments' yet bold comparisons are inappropriate, partly because they would be to some degree of 'unlikes'.

The 'third moment' section is able to dwell - inevitably, given the foregoing - more than the others on process. It includes on thematic grounds a retrospective passage on the history of working-class education that attention to chronology alone would allocate to Part I.

Working-class writing and publishing is relatively rare because of differential class access to both: the dominant social relations and patterns of control of writing/publishing have tended to exclude working-class people. In the three 'moments' explored there have been significant outcroppings; a minority, against-the-tide tradition of working-class writing and publication. The work considered in the first and second moments is seen to have depended chiefly on various kinds of patronage and 'gatekeepers' - with the exception of such publications as union journals directed at a small 'insider' readership. In that sector of the third moment which has been considered the shift of control has been decisive and there has been a partial deconstruction of language categories and the divisions of labour in book production. However, the community publishing project remains, in quantitative terms, modest in scale - especially in comparison with that of the major working-class texts of the 1930s.

For writers, built into the shifts into writing are conflicts within lived experience stemming from class assumptions about writing

activity and the bearing down of traditions and authority of writing/print. Working-class writers can be seen as operating within the constraints of forms developed out of other class experiences and legitimated for working-class writers by the demands of 'outsiders' for representative documentary accounts of working-class experience and attitudes. This together with the resource problems involved in, say, novel production partly explains the preeminence of booklets of autobiography/reminiscence in the third moment.<sup>16</sup>

Much but by no means all of the first and second moment work considered is broadly reassuring to 'outsiders' - prompting, for example, the speculation that such texts as Love on the Dole in their sympathetic portrayal of a non-threatening working-class helped pave the way for the Labour victory of 1945; much but by no means all the work of the third moment constitutes a new sort of 'answering-back' resistance. This decisive shift is closely bound up with new patterns of production and control deriving from new sorts of collectivity and technology.

The self-educational processes and outcomes explored in the study derive from precisely these new patterns and ultimately turn attention back onto the major arena of mainstream education with the question: "If there why not here?". Their study suggests that it is possible for institutionally-conferred labels to be at the same time accepted and rejected and some circumstances in which they can be decisively cast off.

### Research activities

Enquiry into working-class writing since 1971 began, as suggested

above, as text study and that has continued as a core activity in respect of all three 'moments'.<sup>17</sup> (Study of (especially pre-1800 and 'second moment') texts involved numerous journeys: eg. to the BBC Written Archive Centre at Caversham, near Reading (Herbert Hodge files) and to the British Library - both the Newspaper Collection at Colindale (B L Coombes's contribution to the Neath Guardian) and the central Reading Room). However, it soon became clear that understanding community-published work (especially poetry written with performance in mind and prose that started as oral material transcribed), and indeed the working-class writing of earlier 'moments' depended on understanding of contexts of production and distribution. Hence my interests and purposes and the nature of the 'objects' of study led to an eclectic research approach.

The research activities of this study have included attending: FWWCP AGMs and Annual Conferences and member-groups' working-sessions around the country; other conferences (eg 'History Workshop'; WEA; Oral History Society; Age Concern) and lectures; some thirty FWWCP public performances/book launches and the staging at the Liverpool Everyman Theatre of Jimmy McGovern's play True Romance (July, 1983); exhibitions (eg 'Exploring Living Memory'). In addition I have been privileged to receive full documentation from FWWCP (including minutes of the meetings of the Executive Committee over six years) and have corresponded and talked with many individual FWWCP members as well as such others as Pat Hicks (Cab Section, Transport and General Workers Union) and 1930s cab-driver colleagues (such as Dave Ritman and Tom Ellis) who read and contributed to Cab Trade News; Chris Kaufman, editor of the

T G & W U's The Record and colleagues working on the N U R's Rail News:

Jerry Dawson (pre-War Unity Theatre; Merseyside Writers) and John Lehmann.

Finally, I have conducted thirteen formal interviews: seven with individuals face to face (six contemporary working-class writers - Ron Barnes (Hackney), Jimmy McGovern (Liverpool), Roger Mills (Tower Hamlets), Daisy Noakes (Brighton), Joe Smythe (Manchester), Toby (Bristol) - and John Allen, 1930s producer at Unity Theatre; one with a group, face to face (QueenSpark, Brighton): five by letter and/or tape sent by post (East Bowling, Bradford, Emily Hanslip; Cornholme 'Write Your Own History', Jill Liddington; Doris White, Milton Keynes; Evelyn Haythorne, Rotherham and Brian Lewis, Pontefract - both of Yorkshire Arts Circus. (Brian Lewis was interviewed twice; latterly, 'thanks to modern communications technology', by means of a recorded telephone conversation). Major interviewees are introduced in Chapter Nine, especially Notes 8-16, inclusive, and 22.

Generally, the work sequence in respect of face-to-face interviews was as follows:

- 1 Study of the respondent's work and of such biographical data as could be gleaned in advance.
- 2 Explanation in broad terms (usually by letter) of the nature of the study and how the data generated would be used.
- 3 Interview (using tape recorder as notepad).
- 4 Transcription.
- 5 Opportunity for respondent to revise his/her contribution without restriction (on the grounds that there was in this case no special

value in first thoughts).

6     Typing of agreed version.

Two respondents, encountered at the same FWWCP AGM and Conference, constituted an "opportunity sample" (Wragg, 1978, 5): they were "willing to talk", came my way and fitted my research design. In general, respondents have been chosen as the themes of the study have evolved and according to accessibility and research resources. Their inclusion reflects an attempt at 'breadth and balance' in terms of region, and of age and gender of respondents and of tendency of projects.

Note: The Notes/References section of the study is used partly to develop points that cannot be explored in the text and, particularly, to allow (eg. in relation to Ch. 8) a wide range of working-class 'voices' to be heard.

PART I

A FIRST 'MOMENT' OF WORKING-CLASS WRITING

"It now becomes a matter of the highest necessity, that you all join hands and head to create a literature of your own. Your own prose, your own poetry...would put you all more fully in possession of each other's thoughts and thus give you a higher respect for each other, and a clearer perception of what you can do when united."

Thomas Cooper "To the Young Men of the Working Classes"  
Cooper's Journal, I (1850) 129



Two

"The classics of the papier mâché age of our drama have taken up the salutary belief that England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia. Modern prime-makers must needs leave confessions behind them as if they were so many Rousseaus. Our weakest mob-orators think it is a hard case if they cannot spout to posterity. Cabin-boys and drummers are busy with their commentaries de bello Gallico; the John Gilpins of 'the nineteenth century' are the historians of their own anabaseis; and, thanks to 'the march of intellect', we are already rich in the autobiography of pickpockets... the circle of readers has widened strangely in these times; and... emboldens beings who, at any period, would have been mean and base in all their objects and desires, to demand with hardihood the attention and the sympathy of mankind, for thoughts and deeds that, in any period but the present, must have been as obscure as dirty. The mania for this garbage of Confessions, and Recollections, and Reminiscences, and Aniliana, 'is indeed a vile symptom'. It seems as if the ear of that grand impersonation, 'the Reading Public,' had become as filthily prurient as that of an eavesdropping lackey."

Thus, the anonymous reviewer of ten autobiographies (including those of a soldier, a condemned prisoner under sentence of death, and a silver-smith) in sixteen and a half pages of sustained sneering in the high-Tory Quarterly Review,<sup>1</sup> 1826.

A year later, father-of-fourteen John Jones, a 'domestic' in service at Kirkby Hall, near Catterick, Yorkshire, noticed in the newspaper that the Poet Laureate, Robert Southey, was staying at Harrogate - and sent him a sample of his verses. He was not the first to do so. However,<sup>2</sup> Southey encouraged Jones to send more, used his influence to secure (four years later, in 1831) their subscription publication within a volume containing fifty-eight of Jones's poems, a nine-page autobiography and, from Southey, an introductory essay (one hundred and sixty eight pages) on 'the lives and works of our uneducated poets'.<sup>3</sup>

Southey's essay is generous and important in a number of ways - and we shall need to return to it below. Of note at this point is the further evidence it supplies of the sheer number of, as Southey put it,

"Authors and especially poets" (some of them working-class) "who (sent) their works for (his) perusal and opinion and advice thereon"; and who, he was blunt enough to say, constituted "the plague of (his) life".

Indeed Southey closes his Introduction with a declaration that is at the same time humorous and feeling:

"Before I conclude, I must, however in my own behalf, give notice to all whom it may concern, that I, Robert Southey, Poet Laureate, being somewhat advanced in years, and having business enough of my own ~~fully~~ to occupy as much time as can be devoted to it, consistently with a due regard to health, do hereby decline perusing or inspecting any manuscript from any person whatsoever, and desire that no application on that score may be made to me from this time forth..."<sup>4</sup>

The two documents referred to hint at some considerable literary activity and aspiration in the 1820s on the part of 'uneducated', working people; the latter suggests an unsuspected tradition of writing/publication by such people.

The central tasks of Part I are two: to suggest that during, roughly, the first half of the nineteenth century, between Jacobinism and "the great shock and set-back to working-class movements (of) the collapse of Chartism" (Sutherland, 1971, 21-22), in a turbulent period including part of the time in which, in E P Thompson's terms, the working-class was making itself, there occurred a flowering, a first wave of published working-class writing; further, by means of a trawl into the work itself, to characterize that 'moment' in the context of the developments, tendencies, forces that gave rise to it.

As has already been suggested, the working-class writing here under consideration was not entirely unprecedented. It bears relationship to earlier traditions - certainly to a considerable body of writing in the previous two centuries and to the working-class 'oral tradition'.

### A Tradition of 'Uneducated Poets'

Sir Kenneth Clark in The Gothic Revival reminds us that alongside the undoubted revival of gothic in the eighteenth century one must keep in view an important gothic survival: that gothic architecture had since its mediaeval flowering never entirely disappeared (eg in the work of rural architects and builders).<sup>5</sup> Further research into writing/publishing by 'uneducated', working people is likely to suggest an analogous pattern. The examples below suggest in outline a quiet obscure tradition: a 'tributary' feeding into what became a nineteenth century working-class writing 'mainstream'.

Such a tradition might claim an impressive and remote founding father in Caedmon, whom Southey wrote of as

"the best as well as the earliest of our Anglo-Saxon poets... (who) was employed as a night-herdsman when he composed his first verses"

and about whom the Oxford Companion to English Literature adds that he

"entered the monastery of Streaneshalch (Whitby) between 658 and 680, when already an elderly man. He is said by Bede to have been an unlearned herdsman, who received suddenly, in a vision, the power of song, and later put into English verse passages translated to him from the Scriptures."<sup>6</sup>

Nearly a thousand years later arose the extraordinary figure of Thames waterman John Taylor (1580-1653), the 'water-poet'. Taylor augmented his uncertain income by rhyming and his supporters included James I, Charles I and Ben Jonson. He made, and wrote about, a number of extraordinary journeys,<sup>7</sup> "diverted both court and city" and published his collected works in 1630.

In the following century was born in Wiltshire, "of humble parentage",

Stephen Duck (1705-1756). Minimally educated (in an early village charity school) Duck became a farm worker, began to write poetry and produced in treating of the realities of farm toil, verse of power and authority. The story of his advancement and 'translation', through the intervention of patrons (especially Queen Caroline), of the emasculation of his work, the silencing of his true voice, his bereavements and eventual suicide, is well known.<sup>8</sup> What may be less widely appreciated is the influence his fame and patronage exerted on large numbers of would-be imitators and emulators.

On 21 January, 1731 - the year after Queen Caroline had installed Duck in a house at Richmond with an annuity of £30 - the Grub Street Journal devoted its opening columns to what seemed a worrying situation. As evidence of Duck's "influence", and for the attitude it bespeaks - a brand of contempt we shall come to know well in this study - the opening paragraph deserves quotation:

"Qui fit, Maecenas, ut nemo, quam sibi sortem  
Seu ratio dederit, seu fors objecerit, illa  
Contentus vivat." Hor. Serm. I.i

(How comes it, Maecenas, that no man living is  
content with the lot which either his choice  
has given him, or chance has thrown in his way,  
(but each has praise for those who follow other paths)?)<sup>9</sup>

Of all the various employments and amusements in which mankind is daily engaged, none has so much increased the numbers of our Society as Poetry... Wit, which was thought to be setting in the west, is risen again in the east... the late extension of the Royal bounty to Stephen Duck has given birth to new Poets, in a corner of the town, the most remote from the sun-shine of the Court. We lately mentioned an ode to the King, written by an Attorney in Spittle-fields; and have since seen a miscellany of Poems by a poor Weaver in the same neighbourhood. An Attorney indeed turning Poet can have no other bad effect, than stunning our ears, and tiring our

patience. But to have the fields lie neglected, and the loom forsaken, is a melancholy prospect, and looks as if we should in time have neither bread to eat, nor cloaths to put on. The poor Weaver has been tempted to neglect his business, by **STEPHEN DUCK'S** good fortune, as he himself plainly tells us in the introduction to his miscellany,

'The (sic) fortune, DUCK, affects my kinder'd mind.'

And a little after:

'Muse try thy voice in CAROLINA's praise  
Britannia's Queen the Muse's cause maintains;  
And Royal Bounty crowns the Thresher's pains.  
Impartial as the Sun, altho' she smile  
On ev'ry publick Genius in our Isle;  
Yet, loth to these her favours to confine,  
She bids obscure desert appear, and shine...

Far be it from me to presume to direct her Majesty in the disposal of her favours. But was I so happy as to have the ear of that liberal Princess, I would beg leave to represent to her, that the best way to encourage the Weaver, would be constantly to wear the manufacture of Great Britain and the most suitable encouragement to the Thresher, would be to give him a small farm in the country; and to lay both under an absolute restraint, never more to write a line in rhyme or measure."

Evidence for the explosion of poetic activity on the part of work-

ing people, some inspired by the example of Duck, comes from a range of

sources. Rayner Unwin quotes Richard West writing to Horace Walpole

in 1737:

"It is a difficult matter to account why but certain it is that all people, from the duke's coronet to the thresher's flail are desirous to be poets."

Poetry, West observed, had become "as universally contagious as the

10  
smallpox." Unwin adds (34)

"It became almost a fashion amongst the patrons of letters to support at least one 'untaught genius'."

A year after the Grub Street Journal had handed down the judgement quoted above, stocking-weaver and later footman Robert Dodsley (1703 - 1764) publishing The Muse in Livery. His generosity to, and identification with Duck is made explicit in 'Epitaph to Stephen Duck, on his first coming to Court'.



Mary Collier objected (see Klaus, 1985, 14-15) to Duck's belittling the labour of

"...prattling Females, arm'd with Rake and Prong."

She asserts

"So many Hardships daily we go through,  
I boldly say, the like you never knew"

and warms to her work in characterising what more recently has been described (see below) as women's 'second shift':

"When Ev'ning does approach, we homeward hie  
And our domestick Toils incessantly ply:  
Against your coming Home prepare to get  
Our Work all done, Our House in order set:  
Bacon and Dumpling in the pot we boil,  
Our Beds we make, our Swine we feed the while;  
Then wait at Door to see you coming Home,  
And set the Table out against you come;  
. . . . .

Our Children put to Bed, with greatest Care  
We all Things for your coming home prepare:  
You sup, and go to Bed without Delay,  
And rest yourselves till the ensuing Day;  
While we, alas! but little Sleep can have,  
Because our ~~for~~ward Children cry and rave."

She laments

"No Learning ever was bestow'd on me;  
My Life was always spent in Drudgery;  
And not alone; alas! with Grief I find,  
It is the Portion of poor Woman-kind."

Poems on Several Occasions, 9-10

(Quoted in Klaus 1985, 14).

Later in the century James Woodhouse (1735-1820), "the poetical cobbler", helped by William Shenstone - who among other things gave him the use of his library - provoked Dr Johnson, as Unwin observes (77),

into taking "up the mantle of The Grub Street Journal:

"They had better furnish the man with good implements for his trade than raise subscriptions for his poems. He may make an excellent shoemaker, but can never make a good poet."

13

In 1778 The Monthly Review, in addressing the phenomenon under consideration, in a frame of mind and with a rhetoric becoming familiar, tried a fresh approach: denunciation by mock proclamation:

"Whereas it hath been represented to us, upon the oaths of several of our truly and well beloved booksellers, that ...certain weavers and other handicraftmen, and that certain apprentices, shopmen, &c.... have presumed to make rhymes, and discharge them on the Public... we do hereby ordain and decree that every such journeyman taylor, shoemaker, barber, Spitalfields weaver, or other handicraftman, and that every apprentice, shopman &c so offending, in future, shall, for every such first offence, be chained to the compter, for a space, not exceeding twelve, nor less than six days; and that they and each of them shall, for every such second offence, be not only chained to the compter for the said space of time (more or less) but be obliged to wear bobwigs, and slapped hats without girdle or buckle, for the space of six months...Signed SCRIBLERUS".

Finally, of special significance within this tradition of 'uneducated poets' are Robert Bloomfield and Ann Yearsley.

#### Robert Bloomfield (1766-1823)

Bloomfield, judged at 14 too slight for farm-work, travelled from his native Suffolk to join his shoemaker brothers, George and Nat, in their garret in the City of London. From George we learn:

"The reading of the paper we had been used to take by turns; but after Robert came, he mostly read for us, - because his time was of least value. He frequently met with words that he was unacquainted with: of this he often complained. I one day happened, at a book-stall, to see a small dictionary, which had been very ill used. I bought it for him for fourpence. By the help of this he in a little time could read and comprehend the long and beautiful speeches of Burke, Fox, or North." 14

Of his widening reading Paradise Lost, Burns and Thomson's The Seasons

(especially the latter) exerted a marked influence. George reports how, after Robert's marriage, nine years on, and in another garret nearby,



"amid six or seven other workmen, his active mind employed itself in composing The Farmer's Boy".<sup>15</sup>

The poem was rejected by one publisher after another. Finally, in 1798, Bloomfield sent it to Capel Lofft, noted for his benevolence to Nottingham butcher's son Henry Kirke White (1785-1806),<sup>16</sup> and dubbed by Byron:

"the Maecenas of Shoemakers and preface-writer general to distressed versemen; a kind of gratis accoucheur to those who wish to be delivered of rhyme, but do not know how to bring forth".<sup>17</sup>

Lofft "corrected the orthography and grammar"<sup>18</sup> and arranged for publication in 1800. The poem sold 26,000 copies in under three years.<sup>19</sup>

Bloomfield became "the centre of literary interest" and attracted the patronage (which led to an annuity of £15 and a job at the Seal Office) of the Duke of Grafton. The balance of critical judgement was favourable; The Farmer's Boy was received enthusiastically by Southey, Rogers, George Dyer and (later on) John Clare - and by William Hazlitt, who devoted to Bloomfield three pages of Lectures on the English Poets (1819).<sup>20</sup>

In a fascinating general discussion Hazlitt both praises the "self-taught poet" as a "painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still life of the country" and, in the context of a contrast with Thompson -

"Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in springtime and racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thompson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment" -

laments that he

"never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a moral imagination."<sup>21</sup>

Unwin reports (93-94):

"I was determined that what I said on Farming should be EXPERIMENTALLY true', wrote Bloomfield... Thomson's Seasons was never far from him, but the debt was so immediately obvious (the structural plan of the two poems being identical) that he took pains to disassociate himself in treatment of subject from the manner of his great master. 'No Alpine wonders thunder through my verse,' he declared in the opening lines of Spring, obliquely referring to Thomson's love of florid, foreign descriptions."

In a new position in society -

"my Book affairs go on tolerably. I am getting acquainted with another Barronnett" (92-93)

- in a job he hated and knew to be widely regarded as a 'poet's

sinecure', Bloomfield became depressed and hypochondriac:

"I have no time to write down my Rhimes. I have enough on my mind to craze a saint". (104)

Relationships with his patron, Capel Lofft, grew strained - with the faults, apparently, on Lofft's side. Bloomfield was attacked from both ends of the political spectrum: from the Right on the grounds that he had "imbibed both Deistical and Republican principles"; by Cobbett, who "considered (he) had been 'taken in tow' by the Government to prevent him writing in favour of the people".

22

Unwin's essay is illuminating on Bloomfield's later writing -

"His impressions were strong enough, but he had lost the ability to record them spontaneously" (107) -

quoting Bloomfield's telling late remark

"I sometimes dream that I shall one day venture again before the public; something in my old manner, some Country tales, and spiced with love and courtship might yet please, for Rural life by the art of Cooking may be made a relishing and high flavour'd dish, whatever it may be in reality"

and adding (106):

"When he wrote The Farmer's Boy no 'cooking' was required".

In 1817 George Crabbe visited a Bloomfield impoverished through generosity to his family and relatives, and recorded in his journal:

"he had better rested as a shoemaker, or even a farmer's boy, for he would have been a farmer perhaps in time, and now he is an unfortunate poet." 23

Ann Yearsley (1752-1806)

Ann Yearsley was ultimately to be another "unfortunate" uneducated poet. She was a 28 year old, uneducated Bristol milkwoman, poor and, with her growing family, close to starvation, when her gift for poetry came to the attention of Hannah More; founder of the Cheddar schools. Hannah More soon organized an impressive list of aristocratic, ecclesiastical and other subscribers - a means of publication referred to by W A Speck (in Rivers, 1982, 47-48) as

"a half-way house between dependence on a single patron.... and reliance upon sales"

and the self-styled 'Lactilla's' Poems on Several Occasions was published in 1785. The book was well received by a literary public eager to welcome

"any writer who could exemplify the primitive force of genius".

An article on her appeared in The Gentleman's Magazine and she sat for at least two portraits (Tompkins, 1938, 68). 24

The relationship between Hannah More and her protegee is the most interesting aspect of Ann Yearsley's story. Conflict was to develop over two issues: her poetic development and its material returns.

Unwin captures the essence of the first conflict:

"I should be sorry to see the wild vigour of her rustic

muse polished into elegance,' Hannah More wrote to Mrs Montagu. This was a new approach to a proletarian poet. Half a century after Duck had been dieted with a belated neo-classical education, Ann Yearsley was to be allowed to use her perfect ear and instinctive judgment as she pleased. Unfortunately such freedom came to the wrong person, and too late...In her verses Lactilla expresses due humility and a desire to perfect her craft through the good offices of her new-found friends. In particular she asked them to

'Teach me to paint the tremors of the soul,  
In Sorrow's deepest tints'

In the dedication of a subsequent volume she claimed that her works were 'the effusions of NATURE only,' but she freely admitted that nature needed to be perfected by the art of hands more skilled than her own. Thus she abandoned the freedom of expression that Hannah More had wished her to retain, and willingly disciplined herself as a novice to the established poetic order." <sup>25</sup>

The second conflict - over money - destroyed their relationship.

Hannah More had agonised a good deal before deciding on publication lest

"publication should unsettle the sobriety of Ann Yearsley's mind, and, 'by exciting her vanity, indispose her for the laborious employment of her humble condition'. For her condition, though it might be raised above misery, was and must remain humble: she must not be seduced into devoting her time to the 'idleness of poetry', nor transplanted out of her natural surroundings....it would be wrong to encourage her to look above her station."

(Tompkins, 65)

At the point of publication Hannah More drew up for Ann Yearsley's

signature a deed of trust

"by which she and her husband renounced all claim on the profits, which were to be invested in the names of Miss More and Mrs Montagu and expended by them, ~~when and~~ as they thought fit, for the benefit of the milkwoman and her children".

(Tompkins, 70)

This arrangement was queried by Ann Yearsley before, reluctantly, she

signed. Unwin comments ( 80)

"Patronage puts its recipient under an obvious debt of gratitude, but Lactilla's money was her own; and despite the obligation she felt towards Hannah More she considered herself entitled to some voice in the administration of the trust."

Tompkins reports Hannah More's reaction:

"Are you mad, Mrs Yearsley? or have you drank a glass too much?

Who are your advisers? I am certain you have drank, or you would not talk to me in this manner." (Tompkins, 71)

Unwin brings the sad story to a close (80)

"Without the business ability and influence of Hannah More, Ann Yearsley never prospered. Her books continued to sell for a few years, but interest waned, just as it had with her predecessors, and as Walpole had predicted (78) it might with her. For a while she ran a circulating library near Bristol, grew penurious again, and died, probably insane, in 1806."

Space has been taken in sketching the 'uneducated writer' tradition prior to and merging into the 'first moment' of working-class writing, partly because the survey hints at some of the major issues of the study: what it meant for a working person to write and be published; relationships with patrons and publishers; the distinctive features of such writing in relation to dominant modes, critical response and the status of 'literary curiosity'; the struggle for a prerequisite literacy etc. The work of the 'uneducated poets' proved interesting to a limited readership in the context of an ancient pastoral tradition that looked folk-nostalgically to 'simple' rural life for pointers to reassessing values, priorities, etc., in an era characterised by

"the quest for the noble savage... grounded in the genuine belief that it was from lowly and untutored peoples that true greatness originated".<sup>26</sup>

and as diverting 'literary curiosities'.

While poetry seems to have been the dominant form among published writing by working people in the eighteenth century it was, by contrast, prose, especially prose autobiography, that became salient and captured the interest of an enlarged and changing readership in

the context of industrialization/urbanization and the making of the working-class. This body of prose autobiographical description and reflection upon personal experience shares certain characteristics with, and grew out of a long-established genre of, spiritual autobiography - and this constitutes a second written tradition to which brief preliminary attention will be given.

### Spiritual Autobiography

The sixteenth century Reformation abolished oral confession.

27

Thereafter, as Owen Watkins points out, confessions were often made in writing, and from that time written "narratives of suffering" were common.

In the following century those in quest of Godliness were exhorted to read "exemplary Lives". Self-evidently, no sinner might write an autobiographical "exemplary life"; furthermore, no one could publish a personal record to be read

"because he was an exceptionally interesting person, a unique personality; no one in the seventeenth century could have done this without having to admit to the most monstrous egotism. Even vulgar prophets claimed a hearing because they had an urgent message for the world or because they found themselves being used as instruments of a mighty power..." 28

What could and did become common within the quest for Godliness, and where the exchange of experience was valued, was the writing of 'spiritual autobiographies': narratives of religious experience, of progress and backsliding, of important 'moments' of vision and grace,

offering

29

"experimental proof of some of the eternal truths of Christianity".

Far from being "exemplary Lives" these were born out of the conviction

"That God pardon'd such a Man in such a Condition, is often brought home unto another Man in the same Condition".<sup>30</sup>

The genre became popular in the second half of the seventeenth century; over two hundred spiritual autobiographies were written before 1725 - of which the famous examples are those of John Bunyan (1628-1688), Sir Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and George Fox (1624-1691).

The points of interest of this tradition to the present study may be briefly summarised.

First, while self-evidently literacy was a prerequisite of the spiritual autobiographer a significant number of spiritual autobiographers were labouring people or started their lives with minimal formal education and in humble situations and employment: Richard Norwood (1590-1675), who was apprenticed to a fishmonger at 15, ran away to sea, became a soldier, self-taught navigator, inventor, surveyor, schoolmaster and planter, affords one example;<sup>31</sup> John Bunyan, apprentice tinsmith, travelling brazier, soldier, preacher then pastor, another.<sup>32</sup>

Second, spiritual autobiographers tended to have a clear sense of audience. Walter Pringle of Green Know, in a pattern that has been extremely common in all periods of working-class writing, wrote for his children.<sup>33</sup> Of spiritual autobiographers in general Owen Watkins writes (31):

"They knew who they were writing for: their friends and fellow-worshippers, all those who took a serious interest in personal religion, and all those on the fringe of church life who had not yet committed themselves."

The hope was that

"the reading of these confessions would encourage others to make theirs public also." 34

Third, unsurprisingly, 'moments' (of vision, conversion etc) - watersheds, turning points, crises - abound.

Fourth, autobiographies varied in the degree to which they explored and attempted to make sense of a totality of experience in its social context, to which they varied in their motivation -

"Bunyan was haunted by the desire to survey his whole life in one glance, to hold his soul in his hands, the better to possess himself " 35

- and in what they achieved for their authors:

"autobiographies served didactic and autodidactic purposes." 36

Owen Watkins refers to Professor Roy Pascal's view that the purpose of autobiography

"is not to reconstruct the past but to interpret it and thereby find a meaning in the individual life " 37

and quotes Stendhal:

"I do not at all claim to write a history, but quite simply to note down my memories in order to guess what sort of man I have been." 38

Again, referring the explosion of autobiography to its context of time and place Watkins quotes Dr Paul Delaney's comment on

"the age's widespread concern with pinning down a personal identity which had become more elusive than it had ever been before" 39

and speculates on the origins of this concern:

"A potent cause was probably the increasing pressure upon men to make choices. This was most apparent in respect of political religious controversies, but many other areas of life were beginning to offer a new range of possibilities. Changing views about science and man's relationship to



nature; social mobility; exploration and travel; and the wider circulation of news, ideas, and information: all challenged existing habits of thought and traditional loyalties. Roles which men had hitherto accepted without question were no longer perceived as inevitable, and the fact that decisions had to be taken, or were at least now seen to be possible, led inescapably to self-assessment and increasing self-awareness." <sup>40</sup>

He adds (227):

"....it was through the long experience of change from alienation (from God) to reconciliation that a true self-image could be built up step by step. That is why the Puritan self was most adequately expressed in the form of narrative rather than in self-portraiture or meditation." (My emphasis).

The tradition here sketched merges into that of nineteenth century working-class autobiography. Spiritual autobiography continued to be written and read and to exert influence.<sup>41</sup> Trace elements of specifically spiritual autobiography survive - eg. in the autobiography of James Dawson Burn (see below), and in John Clare's autobiographical writings, of which in respect of Clare's sense of special destiny Eric Robinson remarks:

"The resemblances to Bunyan in Grace Abounding or to James Lackington, the Methodist bookseller, are all too clear." <sup>42</sup>

The same exploration of self and experience in relation to context (increasingly social, economic and political rather than religious), the same narratives of struggle and recognition of significant 'moments', the same desires that one autobiography should provoke others - all these features are evident in all three of the 'moments' of working-class writing to be considered.

A 'First moment' of working-class writing: historical context.

Lord Egerton:

"With respect to the ages at which children should begin to labour ... he could not help stating to the House some information which he had received on this subject, and which was communicated to him by a most respectable gentleman, a clergyman, who had been long conversant with such subjects. This gentleman stated, unwillingly, but conscientiously, that he feared that the peculiar bend of the back, and other physical peculiarities requisite to the employment (in the mines), could not be obtained if children were initiated at a later age than twelve."

Hansard, 1842

"So far there have been two great periods of radical statement—the seventeenth-century English Revolution and the early nineteenth century."

43

Christopher Hill

The period c.1790-c.1850 was a time of convulsive change and struggle. In the context of the social upheavals of rapid and haphazard industrialization, urbanization and growth of population (the latter more than doubling in England and Wales between 1800 and 1850), the period saw a tide of unrest and momentous political struggle around extension of the franchise. Popular agitation for parliamentary reform culminated in the Reform Act of 1832, which represented substantial gains for the middle class, "swept away such working-class rights to vote as had existed..., (my emphasis) specifically excluded the working class from any part in electing representatives to Parliament"<sup>44</sup> and opened up an ever-widening rift between working-class and middle-class radicalism. Working-class demands for the franchise later found expression in the six points of the People's Charter and made the first actual in-

roads in the Act of 1867.

Petitions, public meetings and demonstrations - at Spa Fields (1816) and 'Peterloo' (1819), for example - played a part in this process. Especially important, also, was the role of radical texts (especially Tom Paine's The Rights of Man (published 1791-2) - widely-read, influential and suppressed by Pitt as "scandalous, malicious and seditious libel"), and a radical press (especially Cobbett's The Weekly Political Register, The Poor Man's Guardian and the Chartist Northern Star) which led and reflected radical opinion and played an important role in the development of 'working-class consciousness'. In fact the period saw a marked growth of both literacy (especially after 1840) and of reading-matter:<sup>45</sup> a general extension of what Richard Altick has called "the democracy of print".<sup>46</sup>

The growth of literacy and the concomitant growth of demand for literature are, obviously, bound up with educational developments during the period. Provision was multifaceted and included the charity schools (such as Stephen Duck had attended 100 years earlier), Church Sunday schools, and both Anglican and Dissenter 'Society' day-schools, which received state support from 1833. However, alongside a radical critique of all such varieties of provided education (including that of the Mechanics' Institutes and the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge) there also developed another

and working-class educational tradition (which recent scholarship has begun to recover and which is explored below, Ch 10): informal, indigenous, instrumental and, in institutional terms, ephemeral.<sup>47</sup>

Its history is of a curriculum of struggle for 'really useful knowledge', one that was inseparable from other (political, social, economic, industrial) struggles.

As important and interesting as the radical content of such an education were its innovatory forms. The period here sketched saw also the development, of, in particular, two other unique working class institutional forms: 'cooperation' and trade unionism. The French wars and subsequent depressions - as well as mechanization - served to worsen greatly the prospects and living conditions of the 'labouring poor'. Attempts to combine to improve wages and conditions were outlawed by Pitt's Combination Act of 1799 - which remained in force until somewhat loosened in 1824. The same Act of 1799 suppressed the London Corresponding Society, founded in 1792 by Thomas Hardy who, in 1794, had been arrested (with Habeas Corpus suspended), tried for high treason and acquitted. The L C S has often been referred to as the 'prototype working-class institution'. Certainly its openness and 'mutuality' is in common with that of on the one hand 'cooperation', which was widespread by 1830,<sup>48</sup> fourteen years before the famous initiatives of the 'Rochdale pioneers' and, in the form of friendly societies, much older still;<sup>49</sup> also, on the

other, with that of trade unionism which sprang back into life when statutory controls were relaxed by the repeal in 1824 of the Combination Act, only to be proscribed again a year later: nine years before 'Tolpuddle'.

In that same year, 1834, the Poor Law Amendment Act, which addressed "the mischievous ambiguity of the word poor" and "enacted (the) distinction" between those who cannot/do not remedy their condition by labour,<sup>50</sup> coincided with a decline in working-class living standards. The 1830s and 1840s, which saw (1837-1842) the worst slump of the century, constituted a low point within the period of post-Industrial Revolution "whose first fruits were economic and social misery on a scale never before experienced."<sup>51</sup> These years saw Factory Acts (1833, 1844), the Report of the Commission on Child Labour in the Mines and the Mines Act of 1842 - measures which may well have had as much to do with management of the fluctuating demand for labour and establishment of a cost-efficient factory-system as with the humanizing of working conditions.

Reflecting on the period in which the first wave of working-class writing appeared J F C Harrison (1984, 241-242) has written:

"There is a tendency in some accounts of the Industrial Revolution to regard the common people mainly as victims. In some ways of course they were the unfortunate participants in a process of change which they could neither escape nor control. The working class came into being as a reaction to the exploitation of industrial capitalism. But this is not the whole story. The working people were not content with a purely passive role in the transformation of English society, nor had their history prepared them for such docility. They struggled and resisted and adapted to suit their needs as and when they could."

Eric Hobsbawm remarks:

"Eventually the labouring poor made themselves a new sort of sub-order within capitalism, by acquiring consciousness of themselves as 'the working class', by creating the labour movement with its typical aspirations and forms of life..." 52

Harrison again:

"By the 1830s the working classes were no longer largely invisible and could not safely be ignored. The middle classes became aware of the 'bitter discontent grown fierce and mad' which Thomas Carlyle characterized as the condition-of-England' question." 53

Much of the working-class writing of the 'first moment' may be seen precisely as an attempt to participate in meeting growing demand for "authentic accounts" of working-class experience (Klaus, 1985, 78) and in public exploration and debate of this 'condition-of-England': to write rather than be written, to represent working-class experience rather than go on suffering its misrepresentation. Certainly the transformation and turbulence sketched above constitutes more than mere 'background': rather it is the very stuff of which working-class writing made itself.

#### Working-class poetry in the 'first moment'

Poetry and autobiography were the two major 'arenas' of working-class literary endeavour in this 'first moment of working-class writing' - just as they have been so far in the 'third moment', i e, since 1971. It seems possible to group the bulk of the poetry produced by working-class people into three broad categories.

First, poetry by individuals, acting as such, in a variety of ways, with a variety of motives, within a variety of publishing contexts and, usually, supported to some extent by patronage of various kinds: an extension of the 'uneducated poet' tradition.

Second, industrial poetry. Poetry very consciously from within definable communities based on location/occupation; tending to explore collective experience, values, attitudes, aspirations.

Third, political poetry. Poetry consciously from within the broad working-class political movement (centrally from within Chartism) as part of the thrust to create a self-written people's literature.

The first of these rough categories is readily seen as part of a well-established tradition (sketched above); the second represents a vigorous transformation of a cluster of traditions (including 'oral traditions'); the third appears to have been a new departure - springing from, and inconceivable without, the transformations characterised as "the making of the... working-class".

Again, it is of interest to relate these categories to two story-telling traditions proposed by Walter Benjamin and explored in relation to working-class writing by Ken Worpole. Worpole writes:

"In his essay, 'The Storyteller', Walter Benjamin distinguishes between two generic traditions of story-telling, symbolized by two contrasting occupations: the peasant and the voyager. 'If one wants to picture these two groups through their archaic representatives', he wrote, 'one is embodied in the resident tiller of the soil, and the other in the trading seaman'. One told the stories of the village, its people and its history, while the other brought stories from lands where people lived different lives according to different customs."

The analogies between these categories and mine above - my second with Benjamin's first; Benjamin's second with the kinds of actual and metaphorical 'travelling' represented in my first and third - suggest a potential fertility in the study of working-class writing, as Ken Worpole's comment signals:

"Benjamin's distinction remains valuable in contemporary arguments about finding cultural forms and processes which enable the balancing of the local and particular with the national and the international. This is one of the most pressing contemporary political and cultural problems and currently finds its most developed expression in the controversies surrounding the achievements - and also the limitations - of the recent and widespread growth of local people's history projects. This distinction is also useful to employ when looking back at one of the most energetic periods of working-class writing, the 1930s, because by doing so it becomes clear that most recent attention to the writing of that decade has been focused on just one of the traditions - the local - at the expense of understanding attempts to create a different aesthetic working-class experience based not on place and continuity but on dislocation and transience." 54

### Individual 'uneducated' poets

"As the romantic idealization of the unspoiled, the natural, and the spontaneous developed, the self-taught bard was more and more in demand. Within two or three decades after his death in 1796, Burns had become a national legend, and not alone in Scotland. The true extent of his schooling and knowledge of literature was overlooked in the general eagerness to regard him as a plowboy who had inexplicably been visited by genius. The way thus was prepared for John Clare, the Northamptonshire peasant, and James Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, the two most successful and best remembered of the numerous early nineteenth-century versifiers who turned up just in time to provide flesh-and-blood support for romantic theory."

(Richard Altick, 1957, 241).

"The making of the working-class" is bound up with industrializa-

tion, urbanization and collectivity; so as a label "working-class" sits

55

awkwardly on such as John Clare. Instead Altick, as we have seen,

chooses the title "Northamptonshire peasant"; J F C Harrison, following

the inscription on Clare's tombstone, opts for "peasant poet" 56 -

57

and Raymond Williams, "labourer poet". The same broad point applies

to Southey's protege, country-house butler John Jones. The two may be

taken as examples of my first category.

### John Jones (b 1774)

To the present purpose perhaps four points need to be made.

First, he surmounted formidable difficulties in the struggle for



literacy and learning, and to write his verses:

"Living in a family, Sir, in which there are fourteen children, I have devoted but little time exclusively to their (his poems') construction, they having been chiefly composed when in the exercise of my domestic duties, and frequently borne on my memory for two or three weeks before I had leisure to ease it of its burthen." <sup>58</sup>

Second, he was, like many other worker writers, secretive about his writing - and seems to have assumed that a facility for writing might be a bad sign:

"...in the few families I have served, I have lived respected, for in none do I remember of ever being accused of an immoral action, nor with all my propensity to rhyme, have I been charged with a neglect of duty." (My emphasis) <sup>59</sup>

Third, his seeking the intervention and counsel of Southey was clearly of great importance. As a good butler he 'knew his place': 'Sir' occurs nine times in his first (46 lines) letter to Southey, couched in obsequious butlerese, and the rate is jacked up to seventeen times within fifty lines in the second and to thirty three times in ten pages in his third! Similarly, he knew his 'literary place':

"Had I been so fortunate as to come under your notice twenty years ago, your advice and encouragement might have made something better of me..."

"Should it be your opinion, Sir, that by weeding out a few of the worst pieces, and, if their faults were pointed out to me, correcting others, it would not be too contemptible to solicit a subscription for, I might as well, Sir, avail myself of any little benefit it might afford me". <sup>60</sup>

Fourth, contrary to what David Vincent perhaps implies, Jones's poetry does not offer a "reflection of the circumstances of his life" (except in the implicit, inert sense signalled by his deference): there is no exploration of his class position. (Nowhere in his reconciliation to his 'station' more apparent than in his 'Written in Alnwick

Castle' - an institution of which he deeply approves. Ironically, a photograph of this home of the Dukes of Northumberland is juxtaposed, without comment, with description and photographs of grim conditions in nearby mining villages, in a recent working-class autobiography dealing chiefly with the period leading up to 1926).<sup>61</sup>

As patron, Southey, like Hannah More in the case of Ann Yearsley, had no desire to remould his poet protege. His defence of the right to a hearing of 'uneducated poets' (against a chorus of well-bred sneering) does him (as does his general frankness and honest dealing) great credit.<sup>62</sup> However, Southey's justification of poetry as an activity carries less conviction:

"...if (an author) is a good and amiable man, he will be both the better and the happier for writing verse " <sup>63</sup>

and his reasons for promoting the publication of Jones's verses combine confidence in their correct morality and quietistic tendency with a sense - misplaced, as the present study demonstrates! - that

"as the Age of Reason had commenced, and we were advancing with quick step in the March of Intellect, Mr Jones would <sup>64</sup> in all likelihood be the last versifyer of his class."

Richard Altick's view of Southey's essay - that it

"has permanent interest in its reflection of the era's sentimental adulation of the low-born poet" <sup>65</sup>

- is surely close to the mark. The inclusion of Jones's autobiography both adds to the volume's interest a 'literary-curiosity' dimension (powerfully reinforced by Southey's lengthy introductory essay), bids in advance for a certain sort of reading - and perhaps for allowance to be made.

John Clare (1792-1864)

"Keep as you are: your Education has better fitted you for a Poet  
then (sic) all the School Learning in the world would be able to do."

John Taylor <sup>67</sup>

"I have often remarked that your Poetry is much the best when you are  
not describing common things, and if you would raise your Views  
generally, & speak of the Appearances of Nature each Month more  
philosophically (if I may so say) or with more Excitement, you would  
greatly improve these little poems..."

John Taylor <sup>68</sup>

"I would advise young authors not to be upon too close friendships  
with booksellers..."

John Clare <sup>69</sup>

Edmund Blunden, introducing in 1931 the first publication of John Clare's  
Sketches of the Life of John Clare (written in 1821), referred to Clare's

"pre-eminence among those who would be commonly classed as 'uneducated  
poets'". <sup>70</sup>

Viewed for present purposes as an 'uneducated poet' - and leaving aside  
a host of matters that, in the case of a poet of Clare's stature, in-  
vite discussion - a handful of points may be made. (It should be noted  
at the outset that Clare's autobiographical writings and letters - drawn  
on below - need careful evaluation: he had a knowing sense of what  
impressed particular readerships: see eg, Robinson, 1983, viii, and Roger  
Sales's lively discussion (1983, Ch 5).

An influential factor in Clare's becoming a poet was, as it had been  
for many of his eighteenth century forerunners, his coming across (at  
the age of thirteen) fragments of Thomson's The Seasons (Sketches, 57-60).  
Beyond this he bore conscious relationship to the 'uneducated poet'  
tradition, especially signalled in his friendship with, interest in and

influence by the work and experience of, Robert Bloomfield.

In the years preceding publication Clare went, like Jones, to great lengths to hide the fact that he was writing at all. Yet needing 'feedback' he hit on a novel way of testing his work - on his parents:

"My method...was to say I had written it out of a borrowd book and that it was not my own the love of ryhming which I was loath to quit, growing fonder of it every day, drove me to the nessesity of a lie to try the value of their critisisms and by this way I got their remarks unadulterated with prejudice - in this case their expressions woud be, 'Aye boy, if you coud write so, you woud do.' this got me into the secret at once and without divulging mine I scribbld on unnceasing for 2 or 3 years, reciting them every night as I wrote them when my father returnd home from labour and we was all seated by the fire side their remarks was very useful to me at somethings they woud laugh here I distinguishd Affectation and consiet from nature some verses they woud desire me to repeat again as they said they coud not understand them here I discoverd obscurity from common sense and always benefited by making it as much like the latter as I coud, for I thought if they coud not understand me my taste should be wrong founded and not agreeable to nature" 71

(The contrast with Taylor's advice (see above) is instructive). Clare's (well-founded) reluctance to 'come out' as a writer is one instance of a constantly-recurring motif in the experience of worker writers - as we shall see; familiarly, his doing so led to alienation from people he had known all his life:

"I live here... like a lost man in fact like one whom the rest seems careless of having anything to do with - they hardly dare talk in my company for fear I should mention them in my writings & I find more pleasure in wandering the fields then in mixing among my silent neighbours..." 72

Clare was sometimes dependent for publication on drumming up subscription:

"I detested the thoughts of Subscription as being little better than begging money from people that knew nothing of their purchase" 73

and failed to raise sufficient support in at least one documented case.

Famously, Clare suffered at the hands of his supporters: "political

...censorship by (his) evangelical patron, Lord Radstock"<sup>74</sup> and such

"moral censorship" and literary butchery at the hands of his editors

and publishers that in 1825 he wrote:

"Editors are troubled with nice amendings & if Doctors were as fond of amputation as they are of altering & correcting the world would have nothing but cripples."<sup>75</sup>

The price of patronage is perhaps made clearest in a passionate note Clare

sent to his editor John Taylor on 16 May, 1820, following complaints

from Lord Radstock that certain passages in 'Helpstone' and 'Dawnings

of Genius' contained "radical and ungrateful sentiments", and advice from

Mrs Emerson that certain "highly objectionable" passages be removed:

"Dear Taylor,

Being very much bothered lately I must trouble you to leave out the 8 lines in 'Helpstone' beginning 'Accursed wealth' and two under 'When ease and plenty' - and one in 'Dawnings of Genius' 'That necessary tool' leave it out and put \*\*\*\*\* to fill up the blank this will let em see I do it as negligent as possible Don't that canting way of being forced to please I say - I can't abide it and one day or other I will show my Independence more strongly than ever..."<sup>76</sup>

That Clare's title for his 1835 volume 'The Midsummer Cushion' was

rejected in favour of The Rural Muse (with its emphasis on the poet

rather than the poems) hints at orientations, motives, 'packaging' of

the sorts sketched above. Certainly, the earlier sales of Clare's work

(4,000 copies of the first volume, 1820, at a time when it was proving

hard to shift the work of Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth; the latter's

The Excursion selling only 500 copies between 1812-1815) lend support

to Richmond Altick's judgement, quoted above, as to the vogue for the

work of "self-taught bard(s)".

Clare's work, unlike that of Jones, proclaims knowledge, understand-

ings and attitudes which in turn proclaim his class position as a farm

worker living and working through the economic and cultural devastation resulting from the 1809 Enclosure Act:

"the hedger soaked with the dull weather chops  
On at his toils which scarcely keeps him warm" 77

"Inclosure like a Bonaparte let not a thing remain  
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill  
And hung the moles for traitors - though the brook is running still  
It runs a naked brook cold and chill" 78

"Accursed wealth o'er bounding human laws  
Of every evil thou remainst the cause  
Victims of want those wretches such as me  
Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee  
Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed  
And thine our loss of labour and of bread  
Thou art the cause that levels every tree 79  
And woods bow down to clear a way for thee".

Two further and interrelated points need making.

First, and of especial importance to the present study, is the issue of the tension between his non-standard Northamptonshire speech and the language established as conventionally appropriate to writing. His prose is, for example, basically a supple, close-to-speech standard - with occasional nonstandard features:

"What (MSS.) I had I showed them and they was seemingly pleased with them" 80

81

"...I clumb..."

82

"Pootys" (snails)

The attitude he adopts, caught in the following passage from Sketches, had been, as we have seen, beyond the reach of Stephen Duck:

"borrowing a school book of a companion, having some entertaining things in it both in prose and Verse with an introduction by the compiler, who doubtless like myself knew little about either (for such like affect to give advice to others while they want it themselves), in this introduction was rules both for writing as well as reading Compositions in prose and verse, were, stumbling on a remark that a person who knew nothing of grammar was not capable of writing a letter nor even a bill of parcels, I was quite in the suds, seeing that I had gone on thus far without learning the first rudiments of doing it properly for I had hardly heard the name of grammar while at school - but as I had an itch for trying at everything I got hold of, I determined to try grammar, and for that purpose, by the advice of a friend, bought the "Universal Spelling Book" as the most easy assistant for my starting out, but finding a jumble of words classed under this name and that name and this such a figure of speech and that another hard worded figure I turned from further notice of it

in instant disgust for as I knew I could talk to be understood I thought by the same method my writing might be made out as easy and as proper, so in the teeth of grammar I pursued my literary journey as usual, working hard all day and scribbling at night or any leisure hour in any convenient hole or corner I could shove in unseen". 83

Clare's adherence to his "'natural' ways of seeing and thought" was not for want of advice to the contrary:

"Characteristically Charles Lamb wrote mildly to Clare that 84 in his poems 'provincial phrases' were 'too profuse'".

The second and final point has to do with influences, sources: the broader traditions Clare drew upon, as opposed to the narrower tradition of 'uneducated poets' within which he may for present purposes be located. His work shows a ~~rich~~ ~~eclectic~~ eclecticism. He was widely-read in the mainstream of English poetry and came to know personally 85 many of the celebrated literary figures of his time. In addition the importance to him of ballads, folksongs, village customs and folklore and chapbook literature - and the enthusiasm of a semi-literate father who

"was very fond of the superstitious tales that are hawked about a street for a penny, such as old Nixon's Prophecies, Mother Bunches Fairey Tales, and Mother Shipton's Legacy etc he was likewise fond of Ballads and I have heard him make a boast of it over his horn of ale, with his merry companions at the Blue bell public house which was next door that he could sing or recite above a hundred..."

- are everywhere evident in his work. 86

## Industrial Poetry

"Our church parson kept telling us long,  
 We should have better times if we'd hold our tongues,  
 I've houden my tongue till I can hardly draw breath,  
 I think i' my heart he means to clem me to death;  
 I know he lives weel by backbiting the de'il,  
 But he never picked o'er in his life." 87  
 'Th' Owdham weyver', c 1815

"I sing not of warriors bold,  
 Of battles lost of victories won,  
 Of cities sack'd or nations sold,  
 Or cruel deeds by tyrants done

I sing the pitman's plagues and cares,  
 Their labour had and lowly lot  
 Their homely joys and humble fares,  
 Their pray-night oe'r foaming pot". 88

Thomas Armstrong, 1826

"In 1839 John Harland wrote two fascinating articles in the Manchester Guardian where he carefully describes this 'half literary, half oral' poetry, often recited and sung in local theatres and often 'exhibited in rows upon the dead walls of our large towns where a few yards of twine, and here and there a nail driven into the mortar of the wall form the bookstand and reading desk of the lover of song amongst our industrial population." 89

The two outstanding manifestations of 'industrial poetry' arose in the industries of spinning and weaving, on the one hand, and mining on the other. The convulsions of the first industry - ie, transformations from hand- to power-loom weaving, from relative prosperity to economic ruin and social catastrophe - constitute perhaps the 'paradigm example' of the course and impact of the Industrial Revolution; on the other hand the efforts of miners to cast off (a literal) 'bondage' and to improve pay and conditions by means of collective (union) action were, and arguably remain,<sup>90</sup> the paradigm example of working-class industrial struggle.



The two industries had in common that they were long-established (though changing); geographically rooted and identifiable (eg. in a band from Lancashire through the West Riding of Yorkshire in one case; in clusters of isolated pit villages in the other); and, stemming from the above, had developed common cultures, shared experiences, communal values etc. These factors are seen as prerequisite to the development of such literature as was generated.

Martha Vicinus traces the tradition of weavers' song from the sixteenth century. She evokes, on the one hand, in the 'Golden-Age' French-Wars era (1790-1810) of relative prosperity, a literature born of work-skill and confidence, sometimes comic/bawdy, with the industry itself foregrounded as subject-matter and speaking characteristically to a close, knowing, 'insider' audience; and on the other hand, in a time of instant deskilling and catastrophic industrial decline, a literature lamenting the onset of the factory-system, dispossession and defeat - the industry now moving into the background as subject-matter - and speaking beyond it to a broader audience.

Miners' poetry, published by the early mining unions, also built upon traditions - traced back to the 17th century - which were partly indigenous to miners and partly adopted by them ( eg. the songs written by Newcastle merchant John Selkirk about Bob Cranky, a type of "gullible, carousing braggart" <sup>91</sup> miner whom "the miners took to as one of their own").<sup>92</sup>

This poetry dealt with vital issues (such as blacklegging, pit disasters - in increasingly distinctive elegiac forms - and such unlikely poetic

subject-matter as the 'bond issue'). Catalysed by the pit strikes of 1825, 1831 and 1844, miners' poetry attempted to address two audiences: miners, to promote understanding and solidarity; non-miners, within a much-needed public relations exercise.

Writing generally of industrial song, Jon Raven writes:

"Many of the industrial workers' songs stem from two of the worst of (the) wholesale recessions - 1800 to 1815 and 1830 to 1840".<sup>93</sup>

Such songs

"might be composed for fellow workers, workers in other industries whose support and sympathy was useful, or the employers themselves ... Other songs were the casual creative efforts of angry workers who, though unused to the idiom, felt strongly enough 'to work up' a song... they expressed their condition through songs of many kinds; in humble and plaintive moods, as well as militant and demanding. Later, from the 1840s on, the songs begin to take on a different feel."<sup>94</sup>

Two crucial, determining factors seem to have governed the choice of form (in the broadest sense) of industrial poetry.

First, the bulk of those addressed - certainly, for example, the primary (miner) audience of the miner-poets - were illiterate.

Second, the views and aspirations expressed, and the protests voiced, were, in an era of savage class repression, made at high risk.

It is small wonder, on both counts, that poems were written to be sung: that, commonly, printed publication aimed at facilitating wide-spread and repeated oral performances - or was too risky to attempt at all. Hence working-class poetry of this category was most often intended

to find its audience as working-class song. Jon Raven's observation -  
that 'worker's song' became rarer because

"Self-education, union-sponsored education and other forms of mass communication created direct and indirect pressures that, along with other factors, contributed to the eventual destruction of workers' song" 95

- is of a piece with part of this analysis.

### Political Poetry

As noted above, the outcome of the struggle for electoral reform (1832), in which middle-class and working-class radicals participated,

"had shown the working-class the incompatibility of its own interests and those of the bourgeoisie. Hence arose a striving for an independent working-class organisation which...crystallized into Chartism." 96

The Chartist decades (1830s and 1840s) were generally

"a period of great expansion and experimentation in the world of journalism" 97

and, in particular, saw a host of Chartist publications, including The

Northern Star, The Northern Liberator, The Friend of the People, The

Chartist Circular and The Red Republican.

Such publications invariably included poetry: initially

"the works of revolutionary romantics (primarily Shelley and Byron)" 98

but increasingly the poems of working-class people. In fact,

an important aspiration of Chartism came to be the creation

"of a class-based literature, written by and for the people". 99

Thomas Cooper- shoemaker, Chartist and prodigious autodidact - exhorted:

"It now becomes a matter of the highest necessity, that you all join hands and head to create a literature of your own. Your own prose, your own poetry ... would put you all more fully in possession of each other's thoughts and thus give you a higher respect for each other, and a clearer perception of what you can do when united." 100

Out of this conjuncture - what Lenin characterised as

"the first broad and politically organized proletarian-revolutionary movement of the masses " - 101

and coinciding with remarkable and unprecedented opportunities for

working-class publication:

"562 newspapers and journals, containing every sort of prose and poetry, written, printed, published and bought by working men"

(my emphasis) <sup>102</sup> came an upsurge of working-class political poetry.

Martha Vicinus distinguishes "Chartist poets" from "Chartist propagandists and song writers" and suggests that, in contrast to the orientation to song of the 'Industrial poets' discussed above, what I have called the 'political poets' drew on dignified forms (eg sonnet, epic) rather than "song metres and catchy rhymes" <sup>103</sup> and intended to be read rather than heard. The poetic traditions drawn upon included the nature poetry of Wordsworth and Keats, the satirical/political poetry of Byron and Shelley and the work of such as Ebenezer Elliott, the Corn Law Rhymer.

Some working-class poets became famous (Gerald Massey, factory-

worker and errand boy, and W J Linton, engraver, for example),<sup>104</sup>

but the bulk

"signed their poems with pseudonyms and initials or did not sign them at all" <sup>105</sup>

and remain unknown .

There is no space here to examine the political working-class poetry referred to beyond noting that all too often working-class poets heeded such precepts as (from Ernest Jones)

"It is necessary that democratic poets should, in their pages, elevate and not endanger the dignity of the democratic character" <sup>106</sup>

and (from Gerald Massey)

"Life is too real, too earnest, too solemn a thing, to be spent in producing or reading...light literature...Earnestness is at the root of greatness and heroism"; <sup>107</sup>

and that in essaying difficult (and often inappropriate) forms, working-class political poets failed to solve a problem faced, in Martha Vicinus's view, by all Chartist poets:

"how to write appealing and ennobling poetry that was intelligible to the working-class". <sup>108</sup>

Y V Kovalev observes that

"During the last years of Chartism, Chartist poetry gradually lost its connection with the masses." <sup>109</sup>

Some working-class poets developed personal literary ambitions transcending their collective political aspirations;

others wrote for therapy (see discussion of this in

Part III). Working-class poets became far more numerous -

"literally thousands of working men wrote poetry" - <sup>110</sup>

writing and publishing in ways, later in the nineteenth century, that dissolved the categories I have suggested as applicable to this first moment of working-class poetry.

#### Working-class autobiography

"The time has been when an apology would have been thought necessary for obtruding on the notice of the public these passages in the life of a Working Man: that time is however past, and there are now an abundance of precedents to keep any man in countenance who, for reasons good, bad or indifferent, may choose to draw aside the veil from his personal history, and publish it to the world."

Thus Charles Manby Smith in a Preface added to his autobiographical The Working Man's Way in the World, "first published serially (and anonymously) in Tait's Edinburgh Magazine (March 1851 - May 1852)". <sup>111</sup> When this sentence is placed beside the jeremiad of the Quarterly Review (quoted earlier) the suggestion is of a changed

situation: that

"the battle for public acceptance (of autobiographical writing by working-class people) appeared to be over." <sup>112</sup>

David Vincent (1981, 25) identifies shoemaker Thomas Hardy as perhaps the first working-class person to write - if not the first to publish - an autobiography:

"It is no accident that the founder of the prototype working class organisation ... should also be a founder of the tradition

of working class autobiography. The London Corresponding Society was an expression of a demand by working men to take part in the history of their nation..."

Certainly what was a trickle in the first quarter of the nineteenth century became a steady stream in the second quarter and, in relative terms, a flood thereafter. While quantitatively the final quarter yielded more (with veteran Chartists' memoirs featuring prominently) the four decades 1820s through 1850s saw the writing or publication or both of many - perhaps most - of the major and (in some senses) seminal working class autobiographies (eg. Bamford, Bezer, Burn, Clare, Hardy, Lowery, Smith, Somerville).

As within this 'first moment' approximately fifty working-class autobiographies were published it is hardly surprising that they display considerable variety in terms of the circumstances of writers, writing and publication; purposes, intentions, motives, themes; 'approaches', styles, tones; target readerships - and so on. Yet there are certain dominant trends, 'figures in the carpet'. In what follows I seek to sketch such aspects of these working-class autobiographies so as to bring out both their variety and their common tendencies and as a basis for considering below comparable developments in the second and third 'moments'.

#### A comparison

- Two of these early working-class writers - William Dodd and Charles Manby Smith - were born in the same year, 1804. The former

published an autobiography in 1841; <sup>113</sup> the latter a decade later. A brief comparison offers a vignette capturing some of that variety and commonality of working-class autobiography referred to above - and serves to introduce the subsequent outline.

### Biography

Dodd was set to work in a Kendal mill at the age of five. Owing to the posture he had to adopt before the loom -

"his right foot forward, and his right side facing the frame: the motion he makes in going along in front of the frame ...is neither forwards nor backwards, but in a sidling direction, constantly keeping his right side towards the frame... the chief weight of his body rests upon his right knee, which is almost always the first joint to give way." <sup>114</sup>

- he, like many others, became a "factory cripple". Because

"the continual friction of the hand in rubbing the piecing upon the coarse wrapper wears off the skin, and causes the fingers to bleed" <sup>115</sup>

and because

"compelled, under fear of the strap and the billy-roller... to keep in active employ, although my hands were frequently swollen, and the blood was dripping from my fingers' ends" <sup>116</sup>

he eventually suffered amputation of the right hand. At the time of ending his autobiography he was destitute and unemployable.

Smith started life in Devonshire and attended grammar school for two years before the family suffered financial disaster and moved, to escape

"the burden of...compassion and condolence" <sup>117</sup>

to Bristol. Smith became an apprentice compositor; sought in vain for work in London in the depression of the mid-1820s; found work in Paris, where he witnessed the 1830 revolution; found remarkably congenial employment near Bath, on his return; witnessed the Bristol 'Reform Riots';



married 'well'; became "reader in a large London printing office, probably Hansard's." <sup>118</sup>

Context, content, purposes

Dodd "was encouraged to write by Lord Ashley who employed him to gather material for his Factory Campaign" <sup>119</sup> and produced a series of letters illustrating the factory system as well as "the narrative of (his) experience and sufferings". <sup>120</sup> He explained his motives as follows:

".... having witnessed the efforts of some writers (who can know nothing of the factories by experience) to mislead the minds of the public upon a subject of so much importance, I feel it to be my duty to give to the world a fair and impartial account of the working of the factory system as I have found it in twenty-five years' experience...I shall... confine myself...to such facts as may serve to show the effects of the system upon my mind, person, and condition." <sup>121</sup>

While the general 'outsider' public is clearly the target readership,

Dodd does address a final paragraph to his "fellow sufferers". <sup>122</sup>

Smith's purposes are more elusive:

"In the beginning of this narrative, I admonished the reader that I had no story, in the proper sense of the word, to tell. I have neither done, nor seen, nor suffered anything very extraordinary during the course of my humble career; and I had no intention of claiming any man's applause, or his compassion either, by anything I thought fit to record. But I thought, and I think still, that to every mind there is a history belonging, which however imperfectly written, will repay the trouble of perusal; and in presenting the public with so much of mine as I judged it worth while to disclose, I have endeavoured in some sort to show the operation of circumstances in determining the mental bias. If I have not succeeded also in delineating some characteristic peculiarities of the class to which I have belonged nearly all my life, it must be because I have no talent in sketching from nature to whom alone I am indebted for my models." <sup>123</sup>

(As we have already seen he had, arguably, seen some extraordinary

things; as we shall see models other than 'nature' do seem to have

exerted influence upon him). Introducing the 1967 reprint Ellic Howe

remarks of his actual achievement:

"The most striking feature of The Working Man's Way in the World is Smith's description of the insecure and squalid working conditions experienced by the majority of the journey-men compositors and pressmen in London during the 1830s." 124  
(My emphasis).

This seems, for reasons I shall explore below, over-emphatic. David Vincent relates Smith's work to a particular genre

"which emerged from the 1830s onwards as a reaction to the growing urban crisis, otherwise known as the Condition of England Question. The middle class responded to the threats posed by the rapidly expanding towns and cities both by commissioning a series of official and quasi-official studies of the conditions of their inhabitants and by establishing a market for a profitable vein of low life reporting in which the more bizarre areas of urban society were visited by journalists and writers, mostly middle class but including some working class writers and autobiographers, particularly Thomas Cooper and Charles Manby Smith." 125

Certainly, as we shall see below, the target readership seems to have been a middle-class, three-volume-novel-reading public. The core subject matter is his personal and private experience. As this is realised within the context of political upheaval, severe economic depression etc., and as it interpenetrates public events, rich inter-play between private and public worlds is afforded.

#### 'Approaches'

Here, the contrast could scarcely be sharper. Dodd's account is exact, organized, balanced - yet also earnest, agonised, poignant and tinged with a readily forgivable self-pity. The cripple's pathetic attempts to win a wife are caught in a sad detail of his deformed body's special needs:

"... to have married a factory girl, would only have involved both myself and her in greater troubles, I being a cripple; and it would have been something remarkable, 126  
if I could have met with one able to make a shirt."

His feelings overflow at the climax of his misfortune, following the amputation:

"In reading the history of some eastern nations, we find accounts of children having been tied in open baskets to the tops of trees, and there left exposed, an offering to their Gods, till the birds had eaten their flesh from their bones; and of others having been thrown into the Ganges, and there having found a watery grave - and eagerly, in our exalted ideas of civilization, denounce them as barbarians who could be guilty of such cruelties! But how much better would it have been for me, if I had had the good fortune to have been so sacrificed in my infancy, rather than have been put to daily torture for upwards of a quarter of a century, and with the certainty of my miseries still continuing, till my feeble frame sinks beneath its load." <sup>127</sup>

Smith's autobiography is in marked contrast: confident, exuberant, buoyant. It is elaborately written, often pompous, littered with scraps of quotation, Latin tags and dropped names. His sentence-structures appear to owe a good deal to his reading of eighteenth-century literature. <sup>128</sup> as does the 'poetic diction' (eg "finny race" (141) "brawling brooks", "rocky ravines", "waving woods" (144)) he deploys, apparently without irony. Non-standard dialect and pronunciation is reserved for the ignorant and "unimproved", <sup>129</sup> and its speakers briskly dismissed. The entire conception draws on the novel tradition up to and, apparently, including Dickens. Smith himself is like the hero of a picaresque novel (like Roderick Random, say): 'characters' - like "the Fish" and "N-" - are kitted out with one or two leading characteristics (as in Smollett and Dickens); they crop up, disappear, reappear years later in circumstances of great coincidence, are 'translated' ("the Fish" from hard-drinking print worker to begowned court dignitary; "N-" from radical, freethinker to passionate evangelist) - all in ways that

stretch belief. Loose ends of 'plot' are tied up at the close. The work is ambitious and generally impressive (though uneven); often a compelling read. In general, it is small wonder that, as Smith reports on his final page,

"...the first few numbers aroused the spleen of certain editors of newspapers, who denounced them as the work of a hackneyed fictionist, and not the production of a working-man at all." <sup>130</sup>

With unconscious irony he adds:

"I forgave them the gratuitous falsehood. Some of them have since discovered their mistake, and tacitly acknowledged it. Many more have awarded me a far greater meed of encouragement than I am conscious of deserving, for which I beg to return them my hearty thanks."

#### Working-class autobiographies of the 'first moment': context

As we have seen, some autobiographies appeared, like so many nineteenth-century novels, in serial form: Bezer in twelve issues of Christian Socialist (6 September to 13 December 1851); Lowery in thirty three issues of The Weekly Record of the Temperance Movement (15 April, 1856 to 23 May, 1857) - with temperance a dominant theme alongside Chartism - provide further examples. Others appeared in what was to become 'conventional' book form. For example, Hardy's Memoir was first 'published' in readings at anniversary meetings of the London Corresponding Society, and conventionally in 1832 as part of a wider history-of-the-L C S-project, the brain child of Francis Place; Burn's anonymous - and intermittently magnificent - The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy was published by Tweedie, "the main publisher of temperance literature", <sup>131</sup> in book form in 1855.

As with most autobiographies at any time the subjects took up the pen at what felt like a position of stability: when a plateau had been gained from which it seemed possible to look back - and down - to explore and evaluate experience. (The conventional practice of allowing a decent interval before writing autobiography has been challenged in the 'third moment', as we shall see, and the importance urged of writing from 'within the struggle'.) Such typical circumstances sometimes weighted reflections towards a conservatism associated with advancing years, sometimes not.

It is worth mentioning in passing that for the 1980s reader, equipped with admirably-researched information about the autobiographers' fortunes following the publication of their autobiographies, an ironic dimension becomes available. For example, one reads Burn's final passages of quiet satisfaction with how well, after all he has suffered, things have turned out, in the light of awareness of the sharp downturn in his fortunes we know to have ensued.<sup>132</sup>

### Purposes

The timing of autobiography is bound up with its complex and varied purposes. For example, if a strong purpose is to share something of great importance and urgency then the autobiography may well be early. John Bazer's autobiography, with its critique, especially, of organized religion and its fervent Chartist conviction, was published when he was thirty five; William Dodd's vital testimony at thirty-seven. The nature of some other work required greater distance: longer 'germination', an extended period of reflection - that some if not all passion be spent before the past could be represented, understood, evaluated. Again, there seem to be no grounds for assuming that autobiographers had it early in mind to write about their lives but decided (they needed ) to wait for things to fall into place - mentally and otherwise. Rather the evidence available seems to point to a pattern of the idea of autobiography dawning (sometimes at the suggestion of others) rather later on in remarkable lives. 133

A consideration of the marked tendency to present autobiography as originally written for one's children/grandchildren takes us into some of these issues.

### Autobiography for children/grandchildren

Autobiography presented as for the instruction and benefit of children/grand children has been a recurring motif whenever working people have written about their lives. Owen Watkins refers

to the spiritual autobiographer Walter Pringle

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of Greenknow writing for his children; the preamble to John Clare's

Autobiography begins "My dear children....";<sup>135</sup> the 'third moment' abounds

with examples. The 'first moment' was a time of social upheaval, of great and unprecedented geographical mobility in which family and other cultural groupings became fragmented. As with migrant families at all times established patterns of cultural induction and maintenance were broken. What had always been transmitted orally was now at risk because the scene had shifted and because the people involved were typically separated - even unknown to each other. David Vincent observes:

"Those who intended to write for their family or local community might simply be making permanent a set of memories increasingly threatened with dispersal as the twin forces of industrialization and urbanization disrupted older ways of life."<sup>136</sup>

However, as he goes on to imply, one must guard against taking at face value address to children/grandchildren:

"...the truly private autobiography is even rarer than the truly private diary, and by writing down what had previously been spoken, these men were almost inevitably reaching out into a wider audience".

Two contrasting - and very distinguished - examples among 'first moment' autobiographers repay attention in this respect.

Alexander Somerville's Autobiography of a Working Man begins "My dear boy..." In his Preface we read that the book

"was originally written to be read after the author's death, and not before. Personal circumstances which need to be further explained here, have changed this purpose. Public circumstances have also had an influence to decide the author on present publication.. He is now advised that the publication of these chapters may be of more use at the present, than at a future time... All the chapters were, at first, written in letters of affectionate instruction for the use of the author's son, when he might grow to manhood".<sup>137</sup>

On page 80 we come across

"And now, my child, I have something to write of, to which I  
crave your special regard."

Leaving aside the broader and complex issues of the nature and motivations  
of the acts of writing and publishing autobiography, it seems plausible  
that Somerville's original motivation and address may indeed have  
been as he says: that an originally private text was recast for publication.

John Burn (when aged about fifty one) published his autobiography  
in the form of thirteen letters to his eldest son, Thomas:

"in the hope that my numerous trials and difficulties, and the  
experience of my chequered life, may be of service to you in  
in guiding your steps in the path of duty". 138

However, both address-to-son and epistolary form appear to be literary  
devices - just as the epistolary form, and the use of 'History of...' in  
titles, were conventions of an early novel form somewhat unsure of it-  
self and its reception. David Vincent has a useful discussion of Burn's  
use of the form. As he remarks, Burn's is "a very public autobiography". 139

What Burn writes in his Preface is perhaps a more plausible statement of  
purpose:

"THE AUTHOR has been induced to publish this little volume, from  
a consideration that a perusal of the numerous trials and hard  
struggles of his life, may have a tendency to stimulate young  
men to an endeavour to overcome the obstacles and difficulties  
which may surround their early positions in the world". 140

Professor John Burnett's research has shown that the phenomenon  
of genuinely private working-class autobiography should by no means be  
disregarded; research into the 'third moment' certainly, as we shall  
see below, bears this out.



Autobiography and history: setting the record straight

Part of Somerville's drive is to

"warn working men of the perils into which they are led by leaders whom they cannot control"; <sup>141</sup>

another purpose is to set the record straight about the events surrounding, and the aftermath of, his infamous military flogging in 1832 (which matters occupy about a third of the book). Another distinguished autobiographical work - Samuel Bamford's Passages in the Life of a Radical - has come to be valued both intrinsically as "a minor classic of Victorian literature" <sup>142</sup> and as a unique account of radicalism during 1816-1821.

Bamford confines himself almost entirely to events in "which he was personally concerned" <sup>143</sup>, scenes of which he was a 'partaker'. He promises the reader a rough and unfamiliar journey, converse with "the most patient and suffering of his fellow subjects", <sup>144</sup> and enquiry into "by what means their wrongs were produced, and for what purpose they were continued". <sup>145</sup> In all this, as with Somerville, there is a clear sense of an historical task; an 'outsider' readership; an interplay between public events (eg. Peterloo) and private experience; and a political purpose.

Thomas Hardy and Robert Lowery provide further examples of such autobiographical purposes:

Thomas Hardy began his Memoir as follows:

"As every man, whose, actions, from whatever cause, have acquired publicity, is sure, in many things, to be misrepresented, such a man has an undoubted right, nay, it becomes his duty, to leave to posterity a true record of the real motives that influenced his conduct." <sup>146</sup>

David Vincent observes:

"His concern was not only to preserve the past but to connect it with the present...The efforts and sufferings of the pioneers of

the 1790s would lose their meaning if the post-war radicals had no knowledge of them. History could not be made unless it was also recorded". 147

Hardy's context is the history of the London Corresponding Society and his famous part in it. The text is quantitatively more history than autobiography (in crude terms) and his use of the third person in referring to himself strengthens the sense of this.

Robert Lowery seeks to address three readerships (two of them overlapping). He offers "the leading passages of (his) life" <sup>148</sup> (first) in the belief

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"that its incidents may be made useful to (his) fellow working men": those who came later than he into movements for working-class advance might through his work come to understand better those movements' origins and "springs of action". <sup>150</sup>

(Second) Middle-and upper-class readers might come to abandon

"the erroneous assertions and reasonings of these, and even of the public press, on many of the errors of the working men in their public movements, present and past." (Lowery, 39).

All too often

"The wealthy and independent classes only saw the people in the public streets, meetings, or processions; while, with but few exceptions, the writers in the press wrote rather from theories of the inner thought and life of the labouring class, than from an acquaintance with the facts of their condition." (40)

(Third)

"The rising youth of the working classes... will learn the means I used to obtain knowledge under the difficulties of toil and poverty from an early age upwards...My aspirations to be 'a man among men', and the effects of these aspirations on my after circumstances, welfare and happiness, my modes of study and means of attaining what little information I acquired - these may serve as suggestions - helps to young men in such circumstances as mine were, and tend to prove that the necessity to labour does not debar working men from acquiring useful knowledge and intelligence..." (40).

Brian Harrison and Patricia Hollis trace Lowery's change from "Lowery

the Chartist to Lowery the autobiographer", (28) his mellowing with age, the effects of an "emotional maturity which originated in suffering" - and the temperance readership to whom the work was published. Lowery, they conclude, had come

"to recognise that working and middle class men were at last beginning to speak the same language, a language of social responsibility on the middle class side, a language of respectability and shared interests on the working class side... (he) had urged a dialogue between middle and working class in 1841-2; by the 1850s his hopes were being realized and his mood had become optimistic...Transport is cheaper, Lowery points out, writers can publish without the need for patronage, 'every denomination of religion is more active in its operations to do good', progress is on the march...The function of his autobiography for Lowery is therefore to explain one class to another... his purpose seems mainly to show how the lamed son of a seaman became a working class leader...The autobiography sets the scene, so to speak, for the class reconciliation which began in 1840". (Lowery 29-30)

The working-class autobiographers of the 'first moment' - from Hardy and Bamford to Smith and Bazer - held in common a conviction that but for their efforts working class experience would remain unwritten. The variety of their approaches to the writing is the final topic of this section.

#### Approaches

As we have seen in the foregoing, working-class autobiographies in the 'first moment' display certain patterns (of purpose) in common as well as the variousness to be expected in such a body of work. We have noted that what seems to be a common purpose among many autobiographers - writing for the benefit of children/grandchildren - looks often to have been chiefly a formal decision. It is in the approaches taken - including both the 'what' and the 'how' - that variousness is most striking.

#### Content and Themes: the 'what'

~ Some suggestion of the nature of content has already emerged; and David Vincent's study<sup>151</sup> (with such chapter headings as 'Love and Death',

'The Family Economy', 'Childhood', 'The Pursuit of Books', 'The Idea of Useful Knowledge' and 'Knowledge and Freedom' - and the title 'Bread, Knowledge and Freedom') constitutes a thorough survey.

Perhaps three points need to be added.

First, an inevitable variety arises from the sheer variousness of the writers' places of origins, travels, work and general life circumstances, even though as a group they are

"not a true cross-section of the working-class for the period...(in that they)were literate, came predominantly from non-industrial skilled trades, concentrated in urban centers...." <sup>152</sup>

Second, a source of variety lies in the more prominent autobiographers having been remarkable travellers: for example, only John Bezer, among those I have mentioned, is not known to have undertaken substantial journeying.

Third, a single unifying theme seems through all 'first moment' autobiographies, perhaps through all working-class autobiography: that of struggle. The theme of struggle unifies the diversity: struggle to get a living for self and family; struggle for literacy, knowledge, education - in the teeth of every sort of difficulty; struggle for justice and working-class advance - social, economic, political.

#### Manner: "the how"

In matters of style, tone, writing skill etc we encounter wide variety - as emerged from the above consideration of William Dodd and Charles Manby Smith.

Dodd's testimony is 'prosaic' and unliterary, bitter and sometimes impassioned. The work of Hardy and Lowery is even, sustained, competent - the latter's prose growing in skill and force:

"The entrance into the union was by a secret initiation, when a promise of secrecy was given, and a pass-word communicated... However... streaks of light got into the dark spots of their societies..."(87)

"...the speaking consisted of that kind which is ever the most eloquent and impressive to the feelings of the multitude, where speaker and audience are one in feeling and desire. The speaker only gives vent to the hearers' emotions... None need convincing, but all pant for action to carry their conviction out." (96)

The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy is, in contrast, uneven: sometimes tedious, often superb. Burn's portrayal of his unpredictable step father, William McNamee, is a triumph, especially the ironical account of their vagabond travels (in Letter I) -

"When crossing (Locker-Moss) moor, I was set upon the back of the ass, and, being fairly worn out with sleep and fatigue, I tumbled off Neddy's back somewhere about the middle of the moor; and, as the night was very dark, the ass and his companion journeyed on; being sound asleep, I lay, quite comfortable, until daylight, when my father, after a good deal of trouble in finding me, picked me up, and flogged me well for parting company without leave" (45) -

the bold narrative move in rendering McNamee's drunken visions as though Burn too had seen them (48-49) and the ironical delineation of social differentiations:

"Your professional pickpocket looks down with contempt upon a knight of the scrabag, and the highflyer turns up his genteel proboscis at the common cadger." (52)

Two further samples must suffice: one with especial content interest to the multilingual society of the 1980s -

"After a good many vicissitudes and two incarcerations, we arrived in London, and took up our abode in that sylvan retreat where the motley inhabitants spoke all tongues, from Kerry to Constantinople - Church-Lane in St Giles" - (53)

the other a deft account of an horrific-absurd incident following a skirmish between Burn and his brother:

"My father was in the habit of carrying a pocket-knife, with a long Spanish blade, as a life-preserver: in his passion he stabbed at me with this weapon three times in succession; how the blade missed finding its way into my body, considering the power with which it was wielded, I cannot imagine, but the only injury I received was a slight cut on my side little more than skin deep. The first stroke cut the side of my jacket open, and the second severed the waistband of my trousers, while the third cut open the brim of my little felt hat; any one of these blows, if rightly directed, would have spoiled my music, and precluded this biographic sketch." (60)

The autobiography of Samuel Bamford is justly celebrated as a literary achievement. The first third of that of Alexander Somerville, especially the account of a childhood of the direst material privation - including injustices and savagery inflicted during a brief and (typically) seasonal career among better-off pupils in a village school - must be accorded its place among the great autobiographical accounts of early experience. Somerville's eye for telling detail -

"My father and mother had a window (the house had none) consisting of one small pane of glass, and when they moved from one house to another in different parts of Berwickshire in different years, they carried this window with them, and had it fixed in each hovel into which they went as tenants "(2)

"My father worked two miles off at the Skateraw lime kilns; went away every morning before light and came home after dark, having taken a piece of bread made of oatmeal and a bottle of milk with him; the usual bread of barley and beans being too hard for his decaying teeth" (12, My emphasis).

- and for apt analogy -

"... in reading and spelling, and in learning catechisms, psalms and hymns, I may be said to have rushed up, 'ragged radical' as I was, like a weed that over-topped the most tenderly-nourished plants" (21)

proclaim the journalist he became. Other passages - for example this from his description of villagers gathering during a stop on the Scots Greys' (1832) march from Brighton to Birmingham -

"...the trees with the dead of many generations under their roots, bearing on their branches, one might suppose as fruit, a young generation of miniature men in round white hats, smock frocks, leather leggings, and laced-up boots; the fathers and elder brothers of these miniature men thus clustered on the trees, standing on the ground in their round white hats, smock frocks, leather leggings, and laced-up boots, as if they had dropped from the trees when they grew large and heavy..." (130)

suggest, perhaps, the interfusion of a village upbringing, and the village lore he owed especially to his mother, with voracious reading (here the conceit suggests Dickens).

Of considerable interest as aspects of 'first moment' working-class autobiography are their private/public, particular/general, individual/typical dimensions. In respect of this it is sufficient to make three points.

First, several autobiographies derive special interest and effects from their exploring the implications of major political events and social, industrial and economic trends, etc. in terms of detailed accounts of lived experience. None of the work mentioned fails to do this. Such testimony contributes to the understanding and evaluation of historical experience - for both contemporaries and succeeding generations, class 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. That this is held as important - even as a justification of working-class autobiography - emerges repeatedly (in prefaces, digressions from narrative and so on), as we have seen.

The interaction of private and public worlds is the very stuff of Bamford's work - as Bernard Sharratt's subtle study brings out.<sup>153</sup> What is equally interesting - and a rare (journalistic?) contribution - is Alexander Somerville's skilful contextualising of private experience - this (second) point representing the other side of the coin introduced above. In the first third of The Autobiography of a Working Man Somerville's unobtrusive research allows a pointing-up of significance, an enhancement of meaning. Just how delicate is the blend of autobiography and documentary is seen, for example, on pages 12 and 13. The family lived on potatoes so that cattle breaking into the pantry and eating the remaining handfuls was a domestic disaster - especially, as Somerville is careful to point out, because potatoes were very scarce and therefore very dear in the disastrous years of 1816-1817. Again, school was out of the question partly because Somerville's parents could not afford the necessary clothes - until markets slumped in 1818, which resulted in cheaper food - and thus a little to spare for clothes.

Third, autobiographies often represent their experience as typical, representative, generalisable, as we have also seen. David Vincent

remarks of James Burn:

"In his experience of the impact of communication and movement he saw himself as a representative figure of his age."

(Burn, Introduction, 9)

The issue of representativeness will arise again in considering both the second and third 'moments'.

#### Standard and nonstandard language

Samuel Bamford's sometimes use and celebration of Lancashire non-standard dialect and pronunciation is subtle and well-known. However, he and other working-class autobiographers of the 'first moment' operate normally in standard. Robert Lowery is an example -

"Like Lovett Burn and Cooper, Lowery seems self-consciously to have shed his dialect as an encumbrance in the course of his political and intellectual growth"; (Lowery, Introduction, 11)

John Clare, as we have seen, is an exception:

"I deeply regret usefull books out of my reach...the prayers, and simple translations of the Psalms... was such favourite readings with me...the manner of learning children in village schools (is) very erroneous...A dull boy, never turns with pleasures to his school days when he has often been beat 4 times for bad readings in 5 verses of Scripture, no more than a man in renewed prosperity to the time when he was a debtor in a Jail." 154

The general tendency, as we have seen with Charles Manby Smith, and will see in considering the 'second moment', is to reserve nonstandard for the uneducated. (In this respect the work of the 'third moment' represents important new departures).

#### Language: an exception - John Bezer

Angus McLaren has remarked of the autobiographies of 'Victorian artisans' that they are "the last place in which to look for references for anything but the most acceptable forms of behaviour;" 155 the same may be said of their prose. A striking exception, perhaps on both counts, is the 'unbuttoned' work of John Bezer. 156 Here, unusually, a speaking voice



is clearly audible. This autobiography displays rare and vivid inventiveness and dramatisation (eg his errandboy career, especially 162-163); verve, humour and wit:

"I (while working at the production of Bibles for the British and Foreign Society) was singing a hymn quite in a low tone while working; one of the mistresses happened to hear me and imperiously ordered me to desist, though songs were often sung among the binders upstairs. I replied, that I thought it strange I couldn't praise God while working among Bibles, and so was immediately sent about my business". (178)

The writing is vibrant with scraps of actual, implied and imagined dialogue (for example the opening instalment), with racy vernacular language, puns (eg "barberously used", 155) and linguistic playfulness:

"...having an intimate acquaintance with tiles, but no knowledge of stiles; not remembering anything of fields, except Spitalfields and Moorfields, which were no more fields than a horse-chestnut is like a chestnut horse" (173)

economy:

"My education was very meagre; I learnt more in Newgate than at any Sunday school..." (157)

comic juxtaposition:

"itinerant shaver" (164)

light use of scraps of literature (eg 165) - sometimes developing by means of incongruous juxtaposition a piquant irony of style - and some relaxed nonstandard features. Bezer demands extensive quotation; however, a short paragraph about his father, placed alongside that quoted in the following section about his father's conversion, perhaps catches the flavour of some of his striking qualities:

"Father had been an old 'man-o'-wars man,' and the many floggings he had received while serving his country, had left their marks on his back thirty years afterwards; they had done more, - they had left their marks on his soul. They had unmanned him; can you wonder at that? Brutally used, he became a brute - an almost

natural consequence; and yet there are men to be found even to this day, advocates of the lacerating the flesh and hardening the hearts of their fellow creatures simultaneously." (159)

### Spiritual autobiography and working-class autobiography

The new working-class autobiography tradition, which got under way with shoemaker Thomas Hardy's Memoir, was clearly continuous with the puritan spiritual autobiography tradition sketched above.

First, there was, as David Vincent has shown,<sup>157</sup> a survival of the latter; also, it should not be overlooked that some spiritual autobiographies had always dwelt considerably on secular matters.

Second, isolated passages crop up in working-class autobiographies, sitting awkwardly and seeming to belong to the older tradition. William Dodd adds a (quite unprepared) doxology on his final page (as hedge?) as though expected of him; similarly Burn tosses off (unprepared) references to God, and ends with a sentence from Genesis which acquires some fertile ambiguity in the context:

"If God shall be with me, and shall keep me in the way by which I shall walk, and shall give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, and I shall return prosperously to my father's house, the Lord shall be my God." <sup>158</sup>

Third, the traditions have in common a desire to gird readers to the struggle: and there are clear analogies (as well as some important differences - eg the individual/collective dimensions) between the soul's struggle for salvation and the working-class struggle for survival, for a living, marketable skill, literacy and, embracing all, a fair share of political power.

Four, the stress in the puritan tradition on the individual and especially on an inescapable individual responsibility survives, to

baleful effect, in many working-class autobiographies. Such notions as the responsibility of the individual sinner and of miserable backsliding were hard to shake off. A poignant experience in reading this body of work - as in talking to unemployed men and women in the slump as I write - is to find working-class autobiographers assuming personal responsibility for misfortunes arising from political, economic, social systems, and the general misattribution of experienced effects. David Vincent remarks of Burn:

"... whereas the historian can, at almost every point, find explanations in the economic history of the period, in the character and problems of the hatting trade, and in the general position of an unemployed artisan in Glasgow in the 1830s and 40s, Burn is almost wholly preoccupied with his personal responsibility".<sup>159</sup>

Robert Lowery's autobiography has a strong current of individualism. It was, he wrote, aimed to provide

"...helps to young men in such circumstances as mine were" (40)

and was "intended to advertise the cultivation a self-educated working man could acquire" (11). Charles Manby Smith, in an Appendix attacking socialism, made his position very clear:

"For my part, I have more faith in an old adage than in any new system. 'Every man for himself' sounds like a very churlish motto; but when every man has learned to rely upon himself, the plethora in the labour-market will be very much reduced: thousands will emerge from the ranks of working-men, and take post as something better, and a more even balance will be struck between the labour to be done and those who have to do it". (347)

Commenting on the genre of working-class autobiography Brian Harrison

and Patricia Hollis remark:

"The genre persisted as long as the Labour Party's concern to elevate a class could be reconciled with admiration for the social mobility of an individual, and as long as such mobility could plausibly be ascribed to the individual's innate qualities rather than to his cultural and social opportunities. In the course of the twentieth century, however, the social elevation of the working class seemed best attained through more direct methods than through encouraging individual social ascent. As the structural obstacles to working class self-improvement became clearer and as class solidarity extended, so in the years after the first world war the popularity of such books declined. With the modern cult of the 'anti-hero', the reaction against nineteenth-century attitudes is complete." 160

The influence of the spiritual autobiography/conversion literature tradition takes unique form in the superb autobiography of John Bezer (1816-). A prefatory quotation from the first book of Samuel sets the tone:

"And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him". 161

The gap Bezer explores is precisely that between an essential Christianity and the institutional practices suffered in its name:

"...the vile paupers partook of the Sacrament after the respectable among the congregation! Yes; when they had supped off the sacred elements, the lower orders had the leavings - Spiritual Lazaruses, waiting for the crumbs falling from a Saviour's table, the 'Common-people's' Saviour." (172)

The piece is suffused with irony. Bezer's father - a war-wounded "drunkard, a great spendthrift, an awful reprobate" (159) - underwent dramatic conversion one Tuesday evening in Staining Lane Chapel - with mixed results.

On the one hand

"from that time till he died, above eight years, he was a changed man - no more drunkenness or immorality" (160);

on the other

"The consequences, however, of this remarkable change in

my father did not better our pecuniary circumstances...My father's conscientious convictions would not allow him to open his shop on Sundays, and as it was a very poor neighbourhood, Sunday was better than all the week beside to him. His customers rapidly fell off because he was not such 'a joyly fellow' as he was wont to be...his constitution, too, was so much injured by drink, that the sudden change to strict sobriety seemed utterly to <sup>f</sup>ostrate him, and he was always ill." (160-161)

For Bezer himself the biggest payoff from his religious experience was to come when at rock bottom he was moved to try singing hymns in the street:

"hymn after hymn, and street after street, without flagging, while the coppers came rattling down like manna from heaven." (180)

The climax of the piece - and an appropriate final passage (although unintended as such: the journal 'folding' before he could finish the serialization) - is indeed a conversion. However, although for Bezer as dramatic as his father's, this conversion was to Chartism:

"...one after another got up, oh, how I sucked in all they said; 'Why should one man be a slave to another? Why should the many starve, while the few roll in luxuries? Who'll join us, and be free?' 'I will,' cried I, jumping up in the midst. 'I will, and be the most zealous among you - give me a card and let me enrol.' And so...I became a Rebel; - that is to say: Hungry in a land of plenty, I began seriously for the first time in my life to enquire WHY, WHY - a dangerous question...."(186-187)

While the influence of spiritual autobiography/conversion literature is nowhere else, perhaps, seen so potently as in Bezer's parody it is unsurprising that in the work of these tremendous working-class autodidacts, and given the interpenetration of working-class and non-conformist traditions, trace elements of the earlier literary tradition remain. While a period of transition and transformation was bound to generate hybrid institutions of every kind the major shift is nonetheless clear, and is, for example, signalled in autobiography titles which almost without exception mentioned "the specific occupational or

political identity of their authors". David Vincent writes of the working-class autobiographers:

"Whatever the state of their private religious beliefs, they wrote because they knew, or were trying to know, themselves rather than God. Their moral development would only be understood in relation to the actual society in which they lived...The working class autobiographies were founded on a secular understanding of the meaning of the past. The relationship between the self and society was seen as a continuous dialectical process rather than one of ultimate transcendence. In this sense they may be described as objective in their treatment of the material world where the spiritual autobiographies were essentially subjective. Such an approach opened up the possibility of both writing real history, and making it." 162

#### Working-class writing in the 'first moment': overview

"The cheap postage regulation has made men write who never wrote before; and the steam-press has caused those who read but little to read the more."

(James Dawson Burn, 185)

Reflection on the above excursion into the 'first moment of working-class writing' suggests three broad issues to be carried forward into Parts II and III. These are (here artificially separated): the broad context of publication; the circumstances of writers; and the evolution of and relationship between oral and written culture.

#### The context of publication

The eighteenth century had seen the advent of the powered press (Oxenham, 1980, 31) and the Industrial Revolution produced a rapid growth of the printing industry (Innis, 1951, 139); by the 1790s England was "a well developed print society" (Berlanger, in Rivers ed 1982, 6). As we have seen, and as has been extensively documented, analysed and dis-

cussed, the period of the 'first moment' was a time of phenomenal growth of both readership and the supply to it of reading-matter.

Within that broad development there was an unprecedented demand for accounts of working-class experience (including a 'Condition-of-England' interest, and on the part both of established 'outsider' and a new 'insider' readerships) and therefore opportunities arose for publication by working-class writers. (However, the extent of these opportunities demands sober assessment: Gertrude Himmelfarb (1984) is surely justified in writing (with reference to the period 1780-1834) of the "voiceless multitudes of the poor".) The contextualisation of working-class writing and writers in the 'first moment' is enriched by noting some parallels and contrasts within developments in France.

That same romanticism inscribed in Wordsworth's choosing to relate

"incidents and situations from ...low and rustic life...in a selection of language really used by men"

(Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1800 )

and in whose broad context Robert Southey is seen to have acted, was bound up with analogous contemporaneous developments in France.

Michel Ragon (1974, 75) shows how in the 1820s French romantic writers "discovered worker misery", <sup>163</sup> and documents considerable interaction between celebrated bourgeois writers and their working-class counterparts. George Sand considered herself a disciple of print-worker-writer Pierre Leroux (78) and wrote enthusiastic prefaces for the weaver-writer Magu and the mason-writer Charles Poucy. Others who supported and befriended and wrote warmly of particular worker writers included Lamartine, Victor Hugo and Chateaubriand (Ragon, Ch 2). The parallel burgeoning of French working-class writing is placed by Ragon precisely

in the years of the Orleans monarchy:

"Une extraordinaire floraison de poètes ouvriers se produisit entre 1830 et 1848" (my emphasis)

(Ragon, 84)

In these few years, for example, Pierre Leroux took charge of Le Globe; saint-simonien workers founded the journal La Ruche (Beehive) Populaire (in 1839); and L'Atelier (Workshop) and La Foi Nouvelle (New Faith) "published almost exclusively the writings of workers" (88). According to Ragon, two of the three nineteenth century anthologies of workers' poetry were published in the 1840s (and the third in 1856). Working-class writers appeared in many parts of France (91) and across a wide range of occupations (Ch 2).

With the events of 1848 the bubble burst. Many workers writers (including Agricole Perdiguier) went into exile; others, with Proudhon, into prison. "Little by little worker poets fell silent and were quickly forgotten." Ragon goes on to suggest that popular interest shifted from literature to the practical sciences.

Ragon's account suggests in respect of the growing sophistication of working-class writers the same risk, in respect of language, of the loss of vernacular strength as run by writers here in the first and subsequent 'moments'. He quotes Michelet:

"The people...have a great advantage, which they in no way appreciate: that of not knowing conventional language, of not being, as we are, obsessed by the search for well-turned phrases..." (97)

However, as to questions of genre and form, Ragon implies an overwhelming predominance of poetry over prose-writing - a pattern in marked contrast to that discernible here.

In this country the dominant modes, as we have seen, were poetry



and autobiography - the experience of Chartism giving greatest stimulus to, and marking the climax of, both. In this first era of mass-consumption of fiction, in ways that will find parallels in the 'third moment' and both contrasts and parallels in the second, working-class fiction was in all senses negligible. Some reference to the special challenges of writing fiction will be necessary later on. For present purposes noteworthy is David Vincent's discussion of the tendency to dismiss fiction as frivolous among those serious about self-improvement and the acquisition of 'useful knowledge' - which certainly included a large proportion of newly-literate working class-readers. <sup>164</sup>

While publication of autobiography in book form predominated, some (including Bezer, Lowery and Smith) appeared serialised in journals, and at least one in a local newspaper. In regard to poetry 'publication' (print and otherwise) patterns were much more complex. For example, much appeared between conventional covers; some in union journals; much more in broadsides; and a great deal in local newspapers:

"Literally thousands of working men wrote poetry. Virtually every newspaper in the country ran a poetry column; editors were inundated with verse from individuals of every class". <sup>165</sup>

About two-thirds of the working-class autobiographies of the 'first moment' were published in London. As we have seen, some categories of working-class poetry/song of their very nature were firmly located in centres away from London. This degree of balance between London and other urban, industrial centres (especially, perhaps, Lancashire, South Yorkshire, the North East and the Scottish Lowlands) in an era when local printing presses and publishers proliferated and publication costs were relatively cheap, evokes interesting contrasts and parallels

with publication patterns in the 'second and third moments'.

### Circumstances of writers

"never leisure hour pass'd me without making use of it every winter night our once unletterd hut was wonderfully changd in its appearance to a school room the old table, which old as it was doubtless never was honourd with higher employment all its days then the convenience of bearing at meal times the luxury of a barley loaf or dish of potatoes, was now coverd with the rude beggings of scientificall requisitions, pens, ink, and paper one hour, jobbling the pen at sheep hooks and tarbottles, and another trying on a slate a knotty question in Numeration, or Pounds, Shillings and Pence...I started to stamford to buy Thompson (The Seasons), for I teazd my father out of the 1s/6d and woud not let him have any peace till he consented to give it me, but when I got there, I was told by a young shop boy in the street who had a book in his hand which I found to be 'Collins Odes and poems') that the booksellers woud not open the shop on a Sunday this was a disappointment most strongly felt and I returnd home in very low spirits, but haveing to tend horses the next week in company with other boys I plannd a scheme in secret to obtain my wishes by stelth, giving one of the boys a penny to keep my horses in my absence, with an additional penny to keep the Secret I started off and as we was generally soon with getteing out our horses that they might fill themselves before the flyes was out I got to Stamford I dare say before a door had been open and I loiterd about the town for hours ere I could obtain my wishes I at length got it with an agreeable disappointment in return for my first, buying it for 6d less than I had propos'd and never was I more pleasd with a bargain then I was with this shilling purchase On my return the Sun got up and it was a beautiful morning and as I did not like to let any body see me reading on the road of a working day I clumb over the wall into Burghly Park and nestled in a lawn at the wall side...I now venturd to commit my musings readily to paper but with all secresy possible, hiding them when written in an old unused cubbard in the chamber, which when taken for other purposes drove me to the nessesity of seeking another safety in a hole under it in the wall..." 166

John Clare

The working-class writers of the 'first moment' were, without exception, exceptional people. Those about whom we have evidence - the autobiographers and those poets whose brief biographies/autobiographies were included along with their verse - engaged in remarkable struggles to become readers and writers. We may confidently assume this to have been general.

The struggle for self-education, and especially for literacy (including writing) is a major theme of this study. (The nature of that struggle in the 'first moment' is central to a major argument of Part III and its consideration is best postponed). Here it suffices to make a few brief points.

"The very vileness of the life in the herded towns and the very misery and discontent became creative forces...For the harsh discipline of the factories and the ugly wretchedness of the houses that were often no better than hovels, led men naturally to a sphere where they might find some self-expression, and to dreams and theories which might feed hope in their starved spirits...Those gloomy tenements were the forcing houses of intellectual discontent. 167

The period under discussion was characterised by the phrase ("popularized in the 1820s by Lord Brougham, the head of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge")<sup>168</sup> as 'The March of Intellect' - a phrase that was taken up extensively and used more ironically than otherwise.<sup>169</sup> For working-class writers metaphors of mountain-climbing or potholing might have seemed more appropriate. Their work provides abundant testimony to prodigious efforts expended in the many-faceted struggle for literacy.

In his account of nineteenth century developments in France Michel Ragon refers (89ff.) to a number of women writers, including Antoinette Quarre (1813-1847), a Dijon seamstress, and Reine Garde (1810-1887), haberdasher of Aix, with both of whom Lamartine corresponded. Again, as we have seen, women figured significantly in the profile of eighteenth century developments in this country. The dearth of (at least surviving) work by women working-class writers (eg six only of the one hundred and forty two included in David Vincent's study were women) is a striking<sup>170</sup> feature of working-class writing of the 'first moment' - as is the virtual absence of wives from their husbands' autobiographies, a feature by no means restricted to working-class autobiography. Female working-class

literacy lagged even behind male working-class literacy, as is readily explicable in terms of the oppression of working-class women: their imprisonment within homes and cycles of unrelenting drudgery; their detachment from the stimulus of some kinds of (eg workplace and trade union) contact with others - and so on. In fact, involvement in the activities of working-class and related organisations seems to have been a powerful 'educator' (of James Dawson Burn, for example) - especially a strong developer of writing competencies.

Among the facets of struggle referred to above were struggles to acquire books (in both the senses of 'getting hold of' and of affording<sup>172</sup> them); to concentrate before/after exhausting stints of toil (and sometimes in snatched moments during the working day);<sup>173</sup> struggle in winter for warmth and light;<sup>174</sup> for peace and quiet in overcrowded homes; and for privacy where such enterprises as reading and writing drew scorn or worse from family, workmates and others (an enduring problem for working-class writers, as we shall see).

The effects on working class people of the move into writing - a major preoccupation of the study of later developments in working-class writing - are of course largely unknown. The careers of Ann Yearsley and Robert Bloomfield ended unhappily - of Stephen Duck and John Clare tragically; the sense of apartness from family and sometimes from class colleagues becomes a motif in the exploration of later 'moments'.

Finally, the assertion here has been that working-class writers were exceptional. It is sometimes claimed that they were untypical, or atypical of the working-class generally. Such a claim holds good in the preponderance of men over women and, as suggested above, in the preponderance of "nonindustrial", skilled, urban, 'elite' workers. On the

criterion of literacy the evidence is more elusive. The question as to how typical or not it is for working-class people - as opposed to others - to write, is clearly complex (eg what counts as writing in such a context?) and the answer, certainly at present, unknown.

### Oral and written culture

A good deal has been implied/suggested about the relationship between, and the evolution of oral and written culture, for example in considering the (overlapping but unequal) categories of working-class song and working-class poetry. Distinctions of importance to the present study suggest themselves.

First, because speech precedes writing in cultural evolution as in individual development, an implicit sequential, even hierarchical model sometimes takes hold: ie the move into writing is seen as a sort of communicative coming-of-age as well as the apprehension of a more prestigious and powerful communicative mode. While the underlying assumptions about status and influence seem sound enough - a consideration close to the heart of the present study - the notion of a hierarchical progression from oral to written is clearly questionable at various levels.

Second, distinction must be drawn between what starts as oral (or written) and what merely is transmitted orally (or in writing):

"Many of the tales (heard in chimney nooks by the beggar boy, James Dawson Burn) started life in chap-books once read and half-forgotten." 175

Third, there is a complex and unpredictable relationship between modality of origin/circulation on the one hand and communicative force on the other: for example, the move from oral to written by no means automatically, or in any simple way, represented a gain. For example, Hollingworth (1977, 3) refers to

"the rapid and transient movement of dialect poetry at this time from an oral tradition in which it was already well established, though poorly recorded, into a written form where it became more permanent but quickly lost its vitality "

and Martha Vicinus notes that the magnificent industrial song 'Th' Owdham weyver' (quoted above) originally appeared as a (best-selling) printed broadside, then underwent "years of oral circulation" before "Ewan McColl (recently) discovered an old power-loom weaver... who sang a starker and harsher version than any printed in the nineteenth century". 176

Finally - a general point about the oral tradition needs making whose importance in regard to the relationship between oral and written traditions extends beyond the present section into the study as a whole. 'Peasants', 'the labouring poor', 'the lowborn', 'those of humble birth', 'the uneducated', 'the working-class' - all have lived, communicated, developed relationship, made sense of and articulated experience chiefly through the use of language in its oral aspects. The same may be said of all classes and cultures at all times. The important class/cultural issues, however, arise from contemplating the varying degrees of dependence on oral language, of access to writing and print, and the differential respective power and status as between speech and writing in a range of contexts. 177

PART II

A SECOND 'MOMENT OF WORKING-CLASS WRITING

"A calloused hand will never be able to write"

Julien Benda, in Michel Ragon, 1974, 10

Three

HERBERT HODGE

Taxi-driver

1901-1962



It was while studying B L Coombes that I came across a reference to cab-driver Herbert Hodge. After a good deal of sleuthing I was able to discover what he had written and published; with the help of present-day colleagues at the Cab Section of the T & G W U - and a few of Hodge's surviving contemporaries - of John Allen, 1930s producer at Unity Theatre, and B B C (Written) Archivists at Caversham, I was able to discover a good deal about Hodge's experience.

I approached Hodge with such questions in mind as: How did he conceive of and address his readership? What was the role of writing, publishing and related experiences in his 'development'? What light does his experience throw on what it meant then (and perhaps still means) to be a working-class writer where means of publication and access to readers are in the gift of other classes and cultures? As I read his work and explored his experience it became clear that both were potentially of major importance to my project; for perhaps three reasons. First, their consideration generates questions that contribute importantly to the 'agenda' for the climatic task of the study: the analysis of developments 1971-1981. Secondly, his work is remarkable in representing the coincidence in one man's experience of virtually all the major tendencies, possibilities and 'channels' of working-class publication of the 1930s. Thirdly, his output and experience - including journalism (working-class and 'mainstream' popular/commercial), hard-back books, plays, broadcasting and, rare indeed, some theorising discussion of the problems of being an 'uneducated writer', was for a working-class writer uniquely various.

What follows is a 'suggestive case-study' that seeks to do three things. First, I seek to raise issues that will enrich the subsequent

discussion; second, to chart Hodge's development through writing and publishing experience. Third, in tracing Hodge's 'odyssey' along the 'channels' (of which I identify six) of communication/publication available to a working-class writer in the 1930s - and along a readership continuum from small and more-or-less-known to vast and entirely unknown - I attempt to move from particular to general, to suggest what was distinct about the world of working-class writing in Hodge's time.

Partly because Hodge has been almost totally neglected, this chapter is fuller than that devoted to B L Coombes, who has attracted and continues to attract a good deal of interest: a differential attention that does not reflect an estimate of their relative general importance. I attempt to integrate narrative and discussion of Hodge's experience with description and discussion of the developments (construed as agencies of 'publication') with which he came into contact. This results in a calculatedly digressive structure and constitutes the second reason for the greater elaboration of this case-study: coming first it establishes many features of the 'second moment' which are then assumed in the approach to B L Coombes. Finally, the account of Cab Trade News and union journalism - a largely 'hidden' arena of working-class writing - is (when Appendix Two is included) fuller than any other section because of its importance to the study and, again, because it has received little attention elsewhere.

#### Childhood and schooling

Hodge was born on 6 February, 1901, in an attic near Vauxhall Bridge. His father was an upholsterer, often unemployed; his mother had worked as forewoman in her father's wholesale costumier's business but on

its collapse found herself a mere "mechanic's wife". Both parents were disappointed: she sought escape in involvement with the church; he in the pub:

"...they agreed only in one thing: that their marriage was a mistake."<sup>1</sup>

Inevitably in these circumstances, Herbert's childhood was unenviable. They were poor: at 6am each weekday Herbert took his place in a queue - at the baker's (for "stale") one day; at the butcher's (for "pieces") the next. If a visitor came to their rooms two plates would be set out: one of bread and butter (for the guest), the other of bread and margarine (for the family). His mother's attempt to keep up appearances was for Herbert worse than the poverty:

"In private we were working-class, and poor working-class at that. But in public we were shabby-genteel."<sup>2</sup>

During a brief spell living in Lincoln (a time Herbert remembered especially for Saturday nights when he accompanied his father on pub crawls, propping him up as he staggered, waiting dutifully while he did his Henry Irving impression, hauling him up when he collapsed - a time which ended abruptly when his father was taken into custody for assault) the family took in lodgers. It was Herbert's job to clear away the lodgers' breakfast things before setting out for school; but when he was caned for lateness he dare not explain about the lodgers for fear of bringing disgrace on his mother:

"I grew up in the belief that because I was poor I was somehow unclean."<sup>3</sup>

At thirteen Herbert won a scholarship to St Marylebone Grammar

School, where he stayed for eighteen months before his mother agreed to his urgent pleading to leave. He had not done particularly well. Instead of being a "somebody" at his elementary school ("top or second in the examinations") he had become a "nobody" ("usually twelfth or thirteenth"). He had been used to repression and could not cope when the pressure was relaxed; in addition there was the (familiar) circumstance of poor domestic conditions for doing homework. However, M G S did bring one important, formative influence: that of an atheist Scripture teacher who:

"...added a query, giving us always the knowledge there were two opinions. The few months I spent under him probably did me <sup>4</sup>more good than all the years of my schooling put together."

Hodge writes of his ambitions on leaving school (in 1915):

"I wanted to travel all over the world; come home and write a book about it, explaining everything to everybody; and <sup>5</sup>then be a Member of Parliament and help to rule the country."

While it is worth noting that he was to make more headway towards achieving these objectives than seemed probable at that time, in the context of the present study the mention of writing (his first, though he was an eager reader - of Dickens, Zola and Dumas, at least) is of special interest.

#### Work, politics, travel

His ambitions showed no early signs of fulfilment. His first job was in a garage maintaining taxis and he was soon fired for suggesting to his employer - in front of a customer - that he should save his cigarette ends and use the tobacco to roll fresh cigarettes. He became a tyre-fitter at another garage, working the long hours typical of the time and hating the "filth, mess and stink". When he was seventeen

he got his driver's licence and employment as carman for a steam laundry. Resenting the morning hours spent hanging round doing nothing and then having to work late into the evening - all for a fixed wage - he approached the boss with a plan to rationalise work hours by starting at lunchtime. At the first available opportunity - when the returning servicemen flooded back onto the labour market at the end of the war - he was sacked.

His next delivery job gave him the luxury of finishing at 6 pm and the consequent time and energy to think. He speaks of his reading at this time as having consisted of "the shallowly romantic" and the "sweet narcotic". He also speaks of a growing sense of discontent and remarks:

"It was characteristic of me that once aware of my ignorance, I turned to books for help rather than to people." <sup>6</sup>

Making a delivery in Praed Street he saw a second-hand bookshop, noticed in the window An Introduction to Sociology by Herbert Spencer and bought it -

"...mainly, I think, because his Christian name was the same as my own."

He glanced through it while waiting for his next load and writes:

"...I saw there something to wrestle with, something different from anything I'd read before. I was a little dubious, but inclined not to think my half-crown wasted." <sup>7</sup>

This was, as it turned out, putting it mildly.

He began to attend open-air meetings and read the pamphlets distributed at them. Before long he joined the Communist Party and soon became a street-corner speaker himself.

(It was about this time, when Hodge was around 20, that his

father, worn out physically and mentally and back home again after some years away, killed himself.)

Having been sacked yet again Hodge tried to organize a Paddington branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. This proved a frustrating task as, in his analysis, workers were too busy looking for jobs and learning new skills and, in any case, seemed to feel that to organize as unemployed was to admit that might be their permanent condition. However, though his speaking (to dole queues) and organization came to nothing, Hodge remembers this as a happy time.

Then his mother died, leaving £20. At the age of twenty-one he decided to try his luck abroad and set out, packing Herrick, Swinburne and Shaw, for Canada. In his year or so there he worked on farms and a lumber camp; at building, fire-fighting, vehicle-repair and railway track maintenance.

Back in London (now around 23) he worked at a series of garage jobs (more sackings) and then (for three years) as a chauffeur.

Writing and driving: "literary nancy-boy" and "honest cabman"

It was at this time that Herbert Hodge started to write.

"Meanwhile I tried to write. I can't understand why I should have so urgently wanted to. I had no aptitude for it. I could scarcely write a clean sentence. And all I got in exchange were rejection slips. I wrote, or tried to write, short stories. Stories about hobos and section gangs and the labour exchange queue, and sometimes a working-class love story. The trouble was, I suppose, that I attempted the most difficult form first. I ought to have begun with articles."<sup>8</sup>

As author reminiscence this - except, perhaps, for the themes - is familiar enough. But the circumstances he goes on to describe, and the opportunistic use he made of them, resemble those of 'third moment' worker writers like railway guard Joe Smythe (see below).

"Most of my time was spent in hanging about. I sat in the car, or in the servants' room, trying to write. This continual scribbling, of course, was noticed. I gathered from my employers' expressions that they didn't approve of it. It was slightly improper in a chauffeur."

If this new job afforded time and opportunity for writing, its "servant aspect" made difficult the act of writing itself:

"It is difficult for a manual worker to achieve the self-confidence necessary for writing. Before a man can begin to write he's got to feel someone will want to read him. The manual worker is so low in the scale of public estimation, and the power of this mass suggestion is so strong, that no matter how glorious his dreams of masterpieces may be, he can't help feeling as soon as he begins to write, 'What's the use? No one will want to read me.'"

Apart from my inability to write clean English, this was my chief trouble. I was leading a double life. The servant and the writer wouldn't mix. The writer made the servant sensitive, and the servant made the writer diffident. I tried to avoid it by writing under pen-names. But they weren't much help.

If only I could get into print, I thought, I'd have a little more confidence." 10

This is telling, for it seems possible to disentangle those of his problems that beset any beginning writer from those peculiar to his class position, employment, etc. Clearly the business of writing is difficult - for all of us. But beyond this the confidence of Hodge and other worker writers is undermined by two factors related to their social position, both seemingly hinted at here. Firstly, because of well-understood cultural patterns of domination, in the exclusive universe of print working-class voices and experience, rendered by their owners, are all but absent: the general reader's expectation is that print will resonate other voices, encode other experiences. Secondly, while it is difficult to be sure

what he means when talking of an inability to write "clean" sentences and "clean" English, while the references might perhaps be to lean, spare, uncluttered language, they might also be to standard language as distinct from nonstandard (and therefore socially despised) language. The first interpretation would suggest dominant contemporary assumptions about what constitutes "good style" (as evidenced by the widescale admiration of George Orwell's prose): assumptions which place a low valuation on 'untidy' forms closer to those oral modes to which working-class people have been culturally and historically restricted; the second interpretation suggests a kind of self-disgust: a non-linguistic, socially-imposed - especially through dominant notions of "correctness", through differential access to writing and print and through an educational tradition that has acted as agent of both tendencies - and inbuilt sense of inferiority. <sup>11</sup>

Hodge tried writing short stories, imitating almost everything he'd read - "from Wodehouse to Conrad" - and managed to sell a couple as a result of following the advice given in a (£5) correspondence course: "imitate the magazines". Emboldened by this success he tried writing as he wanted to write: "from a socialist angle." The result was, predictably enough, rejection slips:

"One day the fiction editor of one of the larger magazine publishers wrote saying: "you write so well", and went on to deplore my choice of what he called "unpleasant themes." <sup>12</sup>

He tried a novel:

"By the time it had been the round of the publishers and had come back to me, I'd realised I couldn't write well enough



to produce literature, and couldn't think childish enough to write magazine stories.

But I couldn't give up. The writing habit had got me. It was as bad as drink or drugs...

Meanwhile I'd decided that the "gilded cage" aspect of domestic service was spoiling my literary style. I was too comfortable materially and too uncomfortable spiritually to hope to do good work. I had saved fifty pounds...I left...set about writing in earnest...and wrote from early morning until late at night, stopping to eat something out of a tin when I felt hungry.

I wrote my second novel in eight weeks; a story about the unemployed, done in the Conrad manner. But when it was finished, I felt it was too bad to be worth the labour of typing. I could have wept over it.

I pushed it away in a drawer for later consideration and began on a third. But I was temporarily written out. I mooned about for a week to two, scribbling nonsense. Then I was offered a garage job, and decided to take it to try to get my bearings. I spent a good deal of my time there cranking heavy engines, lorry and bus engines, and I was too physically exhausted at the end of the day to do much writing. But I had to do some, or go melancholy mad. I made marks on paper, anyhow; often falling asleep before I'd made very many."<sup>13</sup>

More garage and private-hire chauffeur work followed before, in 1928,

Hodge applied for and, after the usual prolonged preparation and test-

ing "on the knowledge", got a cab-driver's licence. He writes of this move as

"...to find something that should give me enough to live on, and the necessary freedom of spirit to write."<sup>14</sup>

This explanation has been echoed by other worker writers - for example, the 'third moment' cab-driver-writer Ron Barnes.

Soon after, Hodge married and set up house in Fulham and settled into a routine of "cabbing (by night) and writing (by day)". Margaret's support and hard work, reminiscent of what William Cobbett so admired in his wife,<sup>15</sup> became of major importance to Hodge, as he readily testifies in his autobiography (in rhetoric that produces resonances perhaps different in the 1980s from those it produced in 1938!) and as becomes clear in later chapters of his life.

Hodge then tried writing about what he felt he really understood - motor cars - and got articles accepted by a motor journal. When four had been accepted but no cheque arrived he decided to confront the editor. The outcome of this encounter was no cash but the offer of part-time work and on-the-job journalist training. The flexibility afforded by cab-driving - a major factor in the career of Herbert Hodge and other cab-driver-writers - allowed him to accept.<sup>16</sup>

(It was while he was in this job that a daughter was born, prematurely, to Herbert and Margaret Hodge - and died within days).

The job involved writing a range of items for two papers - one a woman's - under a series of pen names, each under a different photograph:

"I was the medical adviser with clean-cut features and Charlie Chaplin moustache, the magazine cover-girl whose beauty hints so surprisingly coincided with the advertisements, the experienced and rather sad-looking female who gave advice on love."<sup>17</sup>

Hodge took some pride in the skill he mustered in carrying this off:

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"since women swallowed it as written by a woman"

and it is clear the experience had value as part of his writer-apprenticeship; Margaret Hodge was not amused. About the reaction of his acquaintances and fellow cab-drivers to his earning by writing there is something of the ambivalence that Ron Barnes also reports:

"...it brought in a certain two pounds for three days' work. And that was now as much as I could earn in five days in the cab.

...More, acquaintances thought better of me as a literary nancy-boy than as an honest cabman. Even my fellow cabmen thought it rather clever of me to get money just for putting words on paper. So I hadn't the will to throw it up." 19

#### 1931: Politics, again, and the Taxidivers' League

After his initiation into the world of **active** politics in the early 1920s Hodge's involvement had steadily diminished. He had quickly become disillusioned with the Communist Party:

"...I was... antagonised by the Communist Party's basis of rigid dogmatism and class hatred " 20

and had settled into doing nothing more than "to vote Labour when the elections came round." He writes of his feelings in 1931:

"Perhaps it was the man in me revolting against the nancy-boy".

Although here he is 'quoting' his colleagues an important point may underly this: for a complex of reasons working-class males may have come to think of writing as unmanly and this may need adding to all the other determining reasons for the relative dearth of working-class writing -

"or perhaps it was simply the slump  
pinching at my belly, but I began  
to feel I ought to be doing something  
for the things I believed in." 21

Then Hodge read in The Observer the manifesto for a New Party written by Oswald Mosley, then Labour M P for Smethwick:

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"it set fire to me."

When Mosley founded his New Party -

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"which politically stood more on the Left than on the Right"

Hodge joined. He attended meetings and a weekend gathering at Mosley's country home; stood against Clement Attlee as parliamentary candidate for Limehouse in the October election; lost his deposit; confirmed growing suspicions about the true direction of Mosley's movement - and left.

In the same year (1931) the Ministry of Transport sought to extend the unhired cabs regulations: further limiting the areas where empty cabs could go during the busy hours of the day. Hodge and other drivers saw these moves as deriving from the power of the bus "combine" and the powerlessness of owner drivers and small proprietors. They felt also that while the Transport and General Workers' Union was "primarily an organisation for collective bargaining between employees and employers (a difficult job, given the structures of the cab trade) something further was needed "to cover... public relations." <sup>24</sup> To this end The Taxidriers' League was formed, launched with a massively-attended meeting in Hyde Park, and rapidly recruited 2,000 members, soon to swell to 6,000. The proposed regulations were withdrawn.

Hodge was active in the Taxidriers' League through 1932 and into 1933. Then there was a policy split. Rival policies were put to the test in an election of officers. Hodge stood, lost and resigned.

#### Union journalism (1): 'Channel One'

When the membership of The Taxidriers' League had reached 6,000 - it was thought high time they had a paper. Hodge got the job editing it. The major problem he encountered - the same that was to bring

about closure of the major cab-trade journal to which Hodge was later to contribute - was the relationship of the content of articles and editorials on the one hand to the views and interests of the advertisers, on the other. The problem is put thus:

"...advertisers aren't content with buying space. They want the editor's soul as well." <sup>25</sup>

Clearly, this has a familiar ring. What is perhaps more important to the present discussion is why Hodge and his team should have opted for a relatively ambitious paper (depending on advertising revenue) rather than a self-financing news sheet. He offers as a reason:

"...in these days, readers have been trained to expect more than a pennyworth of newsprint for their penny." <sup>26</sup>

This assumption about readers' expectations of course raises fundamental questions about the relationships of mass circulation publications, entertainment, etc to consumers and participants in our society. The same questions arise in respect of community television and T V programmes such as B B C's "Open Door": that is how far might the urgency, importance, relevance of what is being discussed win an audience irrespective of the rawness of the 'product', or does that audience need wooing by the blandishments to which mass media products have made them accustomed?

(It is interesting that prominent figures in contemporary workers' writing movements have insisted that working-class publications must be competitive in these respects and that, to a considerable degree, they are <sup>27</sup> so). Hodge's reporting of his experience is in this respect inconclusive:

"by the time I'd published a few articles attacking vested interests, there weren't many advertisements left.

In the end we had to reduce our costs until the paper paid its way on the pennies we got for it. To do this we reduced it in size, bought a second-hand flat-bed machine, and printed it ourselves - getting the columns set up in linotype and making up the pages at the garage bench. In spite of all the worries of that period, it's good to look back on. To set down your

thoughts on paper may be moderately satisfying. But to handle the lead type, set up your words in the chase, and then print them - seeing the whole process through from the original thought to the printed page - that's the full and complete joy of authorship." <sup>28</sup>

If Hodge omits to mention the effect on circulation and reader response to this simplification this passage is important to the present study in what it suggests about the value of involvement in the whole process of what he refers to as "authorship". A discussion of this value is to be important to the assessment of his developments in the 'third moment'.

"Searching for my own philosopher's stone"

By 1933, and after his forays into writing and into national and union politics, he had reached the conclusion that he was:

"neither a strong enough fighter nor a clever enough diplomat to be useful as a man of action; nor sufficiently gifted to be able to write a good novel." <sup>29</sup>

He had acquainted himself with many religions and political beliefs without adopting any one:

"And yet all believers had some truth. And half the time, it seemed to me, they were merely quarrelling over words, not fundamental beliefs.

If someone could devise a new terminology that expressed these fundamentals in a more useful way...

here was something, it seemed to me, that fitted my temperament...

I could read, and compare, and collate; and test the book-learning against my daily experience of men and women." <sup>30</sup>

So, supported - as he freely acknowledges - by Margaret's work, and taking the cab out as few nights as necessary to make her earnings up to a survival income, he set to work on his project, not unlike that to which Mr Casaubon <sup>31</sup> dedicated himself and his bride. And as with The Key To

All Mythologies it was never to appear, though Hodge (writing in 1938)

remained optimistic:

"...the job hasn't advanced enough to be worth talking about yet, though I'm hoping an introductory book will be fit for publication during the next few years." 32

However, Hodge was to find an opportunity to "try out the philosophy" when invited to contribute a regular page to Cab Trade News, the journal of the T.G.W.U Cab Section.

#### Union journalism (2) Cab Trade News

Reading the numbers of Cab Trade News to which Hodge contributed (from 1936 onwards) proves illuminating in two respects. Firstly, there is some of his earliest published work - of a kind that throws considerable light on matters his autobiography does not; secondly, and of central importance to this study, one becomes aware of a key means of publication, and a well-defined, known readership, available to him as a worker writer in his time, place and profession. There were at least five other distinct means of publication (in the broad sense of making voices heard) available to worker writers in the 1930s (with audiences ranging from the more or less predictable and defined to the entirely unknown). Access to the means of publication was extremely restricted - a matter of luck, energy and the possession of certain sorts of talent and credentials. Hodge was to gain access, to varying extents, to all the available means of publication; and much of his importance to the present study consists in this.

I went to Cab Trade News out of interest in Herbert Hodge's career as a worker writer; but it was the journal itself that was to take my attention. Where I had been concentrating my attention on book publication it became apparent, reading through the run from issue one in 1933 to its closure in 1952, that here was a, perhaps the major

arena of workers' writing - certainly in the 1930s.

In the following section I try to anatomise Cab Trade News, and to assess its significance.

Cab Trade News bears on its cover the slogan:

"An Intelligent Journal for Intelligent Men"

and

"The Link Between"

The intended ambiguity of the latter notion is underscored visually (see Appendix One): as well as carrying the idea of the journal's making connections between work colleagues who, by the nature of their work, are more dispersed than most workers, it also expresses the nature of the work itself - linking homes, stations, shops and so on. The notion of bringing workers together, of promoting interaction, is taken up in the opening editorial: C T N is offered as "a forum for all members" (i.e. the then 4000 members of the TGWU Cab Section); in later editions the invitation is extended to non-union members as well. Constantly, in edition after edition, contributions are solicited, readers are invited to reply, to send in views: readers who, as Robert Suckland wrote in November 1935, <sup>33</sup> can talk interestingly on a wide range of topics (a view coinciding with the stock view of the cab driver). Frequently there are such invitations as: "It is hoped that readers will continue this series."

The notion of dialogue is promoted - and closely-argued dialogue at that: referring to the first article in a series by Herbert Hodge in February 1936 the editor writes:

"It is with pleasure that we reintroduce a pen that has again been taken up to give food for thought to the cab trade. If it calls other pens to battle, so much the better."



In view of such a possibility, also in order closely to follow the reasoning as the series develops, readers are advised to keep their copies of the C I N for reference."

Openness is the guiding principle: in inviting the readership to become the writers; in editorial condemnation of secrecy - in national governmental as well as trade union affairs; proclaimed in slogans like

"Not for the Left, Not for the Right, But for All."

The following lists give a flavour of C I N's contents.

#### In most issues

Editorial (the one in October, 1945 is headlined "Whither, Taxi?" ); reports from union branches and union sports reports; articles on union policy and effectiveness, on pension arrangements, on topical issues affecting the cab trade; court proceedings involving cabs and their drivers; accident reports; obituaries; anecdotes of working life; articles on broad (usually political) questions, such as the menace of fascism, the progress of World War II; readers' letters; notices (for example, lists of major functions at West End hotels in the coming month with estimated attendances, arrival and departure times); reports of parliamentary proceedings involving cab trade matters; small and large advertisements (vehicles, tyres, petrol, insurance, job vacancies, support belts, etc).

#### Included occasionally

Short stories, one act plays, poems (usually parodies in satirical vein:

"Two abreast, three abreast,

Four abreast, onward.

Up and down in Piccadilly

"Mooch" the hoping hundreds...

Buses to the right of them,

Buses to the left of them

Private-hire behind them,

Mail-vans and C Os in front of them

Swore and thundered..." Bro. E Friedman, Branch 1/230 (March, 1951)

and quatrains from 'S.P.' in August, 1934, "The Cab-Driver's Lament":

"If he ranks he gets a binder

If he mooches he gets pinched." 34

Other features include: "A Cabman Looks at Westminster Through Trade Union Eyes"; jokes; theatre reviews; articles on the U E A and other available educational agencies; comparative cab trade studies: reports of developments in, for example, France, Belgium, Holland, Mexico Sweden, the U S A and, at length, in the U S S R; articles by employers; gardening notes; wireless notes (by 'Empiricist'); an Esperanto Group column; mock letters from drivers' wives; articles on London history and on cab trade history and struggles; speculative articles and book reviews.

Two further aspects of C T N are worth noticing. Firstly, there are over the years certain recurring themes. These include the poor public image of cab drivers, sometimes promoted in newspaper articles (for example that by Earl Howe in The Evening News and rebutted in C T N December 1936); public misunderstanding of tipping, drivers' earnings and of the relationship between - also of the relationship between the shortest and the quickest rush-hour routes around central London (not necessarily the same); the ambivalent feelings of some drivers who feel that theirs is a 'luxury trade', their service to the better off only ("the poor

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don't take taxis"); of others who give free rides to the needy: of others who argue for and, like Herbert Hodge, invest time, effort and money in cooperative cab ventures; the well-known charitable activities (annual outings to the coast) of cab drivers; the continuing debates on 'limitation' <sup>36</sup> and radio cabs.

A second feature is the widespread use by contributors of pen names: "Shelterite", "Nightman", "Journeyman", "Stormy Petrel", "Repentant Outsider", "Flight", "Geta Moovon", "The Courier", "Ask me Another" (Hodge himself adopted the name "Roger Gullan" for a while). It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for a practice common also among contemporary working-class writers in France (Ragon, 238, 262). Perhaps a lack of confidence about their language/writing? (Hodge, as we saw above, seemed to seek by this means psychological support). Perhaps embarrassment that colleagues on the rank or in the cab shelter should know them as writers (which certainly has concerned Ron Barnes nearer our time)? Perhaps an unwillingness to advertise their views - to certain acquaintances, employers...? Interestingly, neither in the recently reintroduced CTN, nor (with a single exception) in the body of 'third moment' work have I come across use of pen names.

#### Hodge's contribution to CTN and CTN's contribution to Hodge

##### (1) "Trying out the philosophy"

Hodge's contribution to C.T.N was a series of monthly pieces between February, 1936 and May, 1938. C.T.N "had offered (him) a regular page to express (his) opinions":

"I saw this offer as a splendid chance to try out the philosophy. Most of what I had written hitherto had been merely thinking on paper - finding out what I believed, rather than expressing the beliefs. Now I was ready to begin." <sup>37</sup>

In February, 1936 came the first of a series of lengthy articles - a

series which ended abruptly and amid controversy with No 14 in March 1937. These articles and the circumstances of their production and reception are explored in some detail in Appendix Two; here it is necessary only to suggest the significance of the episode in the context of Hodge's development.

Hodge proceeded to explore, in unhurried monthly instalments, such formidable themes as the nature of human nature; the extent of determinations (social, political, economic) upon it; and the pre-conditions of establishing a socialist society. The ambition and high seriousness of the series are impressive. However, when after ten months Hodge's ground-clearing analysis was still incomplete and there was still "not the slightest inkling of what Hodgism was going to be" (CTM, September, 1938, ed), the 'feedback' suggested an increasingly restive readership. The series was brought to a premature end.

Reflecting on the experience Hodge seems to have drawn the groundless conclusion that the readers were not up to it, that they wanted instant prescription and so on. In fact the problem lay in his crucial misjudgement of the nature, possibilities and limitations of monthly journalism that was read very often in the cab between 'fares' by a casual and irregular - as well as a stable - readership. Hodge, then, misjudged his medium and the expectations and circumstances of 'the reader in the cab'; rather his attention focussed on "trying out the philosophy". At this point he had much to discover about communication and about audiences; this experience must be seen, in the longer term, as an important episode in that learning. <sup>38</sup>

(ii) Book Review Editor

If it says impressively much about a working men's trade union journal

that it was prepared to find substantial space month after month for the sort of enquiry sketched above, it says more that it was now willing to devote the best part of two pages an issue to a book review section. Starting with the very next issue Hodge took on the job of Review Editor, a position he held till, again apparently amid controversy, he relinquished it in May 1938. For the first four months Hodge wrote it single-handed. The following paragraphs outline and analyse developments during Hodge's reign: to see what he made of his opportunities.

First (April, 1937) came a three-column review of a biography of Mussolini: Sawdust Caesar by George Seldes, published a year earlier. Hodge offers an exposition of the book's 'argument' and a response (roughly, that the experience explored in the book strengthened the need "for a united front of working-class parties"). Not surprisingly Hodge was in no position to take on the question of the book's own validity.

The next month Hodge devoted his space to an article entitled "What Do You Read?". Typifying the democratic, two-way, interactive ethos of both his approach and that of CIN at this time, the piece starts with an invitation to cab-drivers to feed back to their journal what they read "to while away the binders" (intervals between 'fares'):

"I've taken on the job of editing this page, and want to make it as useful<sup>39</sup> as I can. If I know the kind of books you like I shall know what books to review."  
(Myemphasis).

This leads him to raise a matter about which he clearly felt

strongly and to which he recurs repeatedly elsewhere: the use of and participation by working people in public libraries. Somewhat heavily he reminds colleagues that:

"Public libraries were instituted for the benefit of men like you and me who can't afford to buy books... however eager the (library) committee members may be to function efficiently, it is obvious that they cannot know the books we want unless we tell them. So if a book you want isn't in the library, it is up to you to suggest its purchase."

He describes having suggested to his local library at Battersea that they purchase Mind and Society by Valfredo Pareto (four volumes) and the "lovely feeling" of collecting it:

"...brand, spanking new - and allowed me four months to read it in." <sup>40</sup>

This passage illustrates two of Hodge's most marked and attractive features: enthusiasm and practicality - keenness to impart "really useful knowledge".

(Compare the following from a review of some of the short stories of

H E Bates:

"I always think a book of short stories is particularly good for reading on the cab, since you can complete a story in a single sitting. When the work's bad, you read one between every move." <sup>41</sup>

It is interesting to note a(perhaps normative)portrayal of the community of cab drivers as a community of readers (possible to infer from the use of the ambiguous pronoun "you"?); also to speculate on what, had Hodge's continuing one-man 'library education' campaign in any dramatic measure succeeded, the impact might have been on a library system which, presumably, functions only so long as the great majority of the community do not make use of it).

Hodge goes on:

"I've taken on the job of editing this page, but not, I hope of writing it. At least, not all of it, I want to

make this a sort of literary forum, a place where we can discuss books ...And not only...books, but ...pamphlets, newspaper articles, wireless talks, cinema shows - anything that attempts to give a picture of life... the Editorial Committee... conceive of a book page not so much as the presentation of one man's ideas about the books he reads, as an open place where all readers of The Cab Trade News may gather to discuss the relation of books to life. It is as though we met to debate the question: 'How and why is such-and-such a book a true - or untrue - presentation of the life we workers know?'"

(The suggestions here of writing and print as an (often second-best) substitute for face-to-face contact and dialogue are to crop up again in contemporary working-class writing/publication and point to broad features of cultures whose dominant modes of transaction are oral and face-to-face).<sup>42</sup>

This ushers in Hodge's final paragraphs headed 'The Worker's View':

"Most books are reviewed by middle-class people who, by reason of their peculiar class associations, see life very differently from ourselves. To take one example alone, the fact that most of us live out our whole lives with less than five pounds between ourselves and destitution makes life seem a very chancy business. We walk a narrow knife-edge, upon either side of which the gaping abyss of starvation yawns to swallow us... To men like us, therefore, a book that treats of life as though it were a pretty promenade in a walled garden, sheltered from the east winds of adversity, is sheer wishwash... Yet it is probably just the kind of book that our comfortably-circumstanced middle-class reviewer would praise... He has never had to walk the knife-edge, and can still conceive of life as a walled garden. We workers have our own and very different standard of measurement. A workers' journal, therefore, must apply this standard to the books it reviews. Or don't you agree? Is there some impartial, sheerly aesthetic viewpoint from which books should be judged? Whether you agree with me or not, write and let me know the kind of books you want to read about. And, more importantly, what you think of some one book you have recently read. Only with your co-operation shall I be able to make this page a valuable contribution to the thought-stuff of our class."

This passage offers something apparently rare before 1971: a worker writer theorising about literature, criticism and the social class circumstances of readers - issues that permeate any enquiry into working-class writing, and this study in particular. If one looks through the surface awkwardnesses and, perhaps, hyperbole (always keeping in mind how actual the "abyss" referred to was and seemed at the time of writing) what emerge are many of the central issues of the sociology of literature stated forcefully in language (except, perhaps his use of 'aesthetic') that 'the reader in the cab' would be at home with. No mean achievement.

Next (June, 1937) came a full-length review of Decline and Fall of the Labour Party by John Scanlon, re-read for the purpose. (No reviewer's copies of new books forthcoming, apparently!<sup>43</sup>) Again, as with Sawdust Caesar, there is lucid exposition, some naivete. Scanlon, he says,

"...contents himself with showing the growth of the disease and makes no suggestions for curing it."

Hodge is ready with an instant conclusion:

"When we take office by compromising our principles we win nothing."

In July, 1937, Hodge reviewed Back from the U S S R by Andre Gide.

Hodge represents Gide's saddened and disillusioned view:

"Every morning Pravda teaches them just what they should know and think and believe "

registers surprise that Gide had imagined things might be otherwise and recurs to a theme that readers who had stuck with the 'philosophy' series would have recognised: that the faults lie not in systems but



in ourselves.

This review apparently caused a rumpus in the Editorial Committee.

Hodge was to write:

"That (reviewing books) went well enough for a month or two - until I praised the wrong book. Then there was another outcry. I'd recommended a book by a man who'd criticised Russia." 44

The Editor of C T N, in reviewing Hodge's autobiography in September, 1938, commented:

"...his reign as Book Review Editor...did not come to an end (as might be thought from his reference to "another outcry") because of his review of a book criticising Russia, but because his ...writing deprived us of his services."

Hodge had seemed to imply, but did not state, that this incident was the end of something in his work for and relationship with C T N. The implication seems unfounded. He continued as Book Review Editor for a further eleven months.

In that eleven months - starting in the edition which ran the Gide review - Hodge's open-door policy began to pay off. 'Plebeian' contributed a celebration of A Tale of Two Cities which, a school prize read in boyhood, had excited just as strong political feelings when recently re-read as at first; also a review of Tom Paine's The Rights of Man. Several other cab-drivers contributed reviews - one (October, 1937) a lengthy counter-blast to Hodge's dismissal (in the previous issue) of a book about the Cooperative Movement. Bro L G Head's reviews (of a series of Left Book Club choices) began to outnumber those of other drivers and it was he who became the new Book Review Editor. 45

Cab Trade News: 'evaluation'

C.T.N., in its participatory processes and in that its content and concerns were so various, was especially in the few years under consideration (a veritable 'Golden Age') - and in fact for most of its pre-World War II history - of simply remarkable quality. It emerges impressively as the expression, firstly, of communality: of a cooperative venture in which people 'talked' to each other on a two-way basis and in a way unachieved - perhaps unachievable - in mainstream, mass circulation publishing ventures; where people 'talked' to each other in print because numbers, geography and nature of work ruled out face-to-face contact (seen always as preferable); of the skill and expertise at large in a body of working men. Secondly, it bespeaks the formidable energy, talent and organization of the protagonists. For workers contributing to it, if the readership was relatively narrow and homogeneous (and in one sense to make that speculation on the basis of common employment is questionable) certainly the opportunities for writing in a variety of roles, modes and forms was wide indeed. The world that suggests itself as one reads through C.T.N. is of writers learning: to meet copy deadlines; work within word limits; weigh the needs of a readership; present the essence of perhaps rambling, ~~heated or~~ boring meetings in readable form; conduct an argument; formulate response to an argument or a set of proposals, or a book or a play; make a short story or poem or playlet - in short, undergoing a full range of writerly experience. The temptation is to talk of apprenticeship as though this work was somehow of minor importance: useful merely as preparation for real writing, important writing later on (for example, of books, plays, poems ~~commercially~~ published - or mass circulation journalism). While

Hodge's work for CTN can be seen as the serving of just such an apprenticeship, and while it is not without importance that he and many other writers did aspire to address the widest imaginable audience (at the farthest end of James Moffett's audience continuum), CTN, addressing a limited, definable readership, had many features that made it important to the people who produced and read it and to any complete account of working-class writing.

Like any other journal or institution C T N over the years evolved: expanded and shrank - quantitatively and qualitatively. Change occurred as contributors appeared and disappeared; as the readership made its views known; under the influence of shifting editorial policy (on issues and on the roles of the journal); when burning cab-trade issues claimed the lion's share of space; as wartime paper restrictions impinged; as advertising revenue - a barometer of some of the foregoing - flowed and ebbed.

One way of analysing the changing nature of C T N is by means of a continuum: from 'Preponderance of 'hard' union/political matters' (A) at one end to 'Substantial space devoted to 'soft' 'cultural' matters' (B) at the other. It is possible to plot where, on such a continuum at any given time CTN could be said to have been located. Cautious use of this framework might serve to characterise the period of CTN which included Hodge's chief contributions.

Firstly, there is little doubt that during these months C T N moved as far towards B as any such journal could imaginably do, and far further than any reasonably comparable journal I am aware of.

Full demonstration of this here would go beyond the scope of the present study; however, the nature and scope of Hodge's contribution points clearly in this direction. In fact, until one draws back from the 'data' of, say, the 1936 and 1937 issues and remembers there were 10,000 cab drivers on the streets of London at that time, one finds oneself half imagining a work force largely preoccupied with either sketching dramas; composing verses and political squibs; debating in print issues of union, national and international politics; mailing off scripts; or waiting, critical pens poised, to react to the above: all, in the old formulation, hard put to it to find 'time to go to work'. (Except, that, extraordinarily, this flurry of activity was generated by men very much at work: long, exhausting hours of work at that). The flavour of all this comes not merely through the work of Hodge.

48

In the (earlier) period under consideration there is a sense of C T N being partly appropriated as a broadly 'cultural' review by a small group of able, lively, serious-minded and formidably energetic cab-drivers. These developments naturally did not go unnoticed and were not without their critics. However, CTN's finances were healthy<sup>49</sup> and it never became a coterie review because the principles of openness survived while the principals did not.

#### Hodge and Unity Theatre

Living for the most part from what Margaret could earn, Hodge stuck doggedly to his philosophy project. Occasionally there would be a 'writing block'; in such cases

"A few days' mental relaxation on the cab cleared the stoppage."

50

In 1935 or 1936 he met another cabman, Robert Buckland, who apart from being a fellow contributor to Cab Trade News was writing - and selling -

magazine stories:

"I envied the money he was getting".<sup>51</sup>

So began a collaboration: Hodge strong on ideas, Buckland on the required technique. Then Buckland was asked by Cab Trade News to review Unity Theatre's production of Waiting for Lefty by Clifford Odets. He admired what he saw, joined Unity - and urged Hodge to join too.

### Unity Theatre

Left theatre in the 1930s has been receiving considerable attention in recent years.<sup>52</sup> The story, reflecting interestingly that of the earliest origins of theatre itself, is of open-air performances - on the backs of lorries, on street corners, at factory gates during strikes, as part of demonstrations (themselves a sort of street theatre) - as well as in various halls and theatres. In a brief survey (written in 1940)

John Lehmann writes:

"In connection with the Left Book Club... a Theatre Guild was founded with branches all over the country; but Unity Theatre, starting in small tumbledown premises near King's Cross, flourished beyond them all."<sup>53</sup>

The class-basis of the membership of these 1930s Left theatre organisations in general, and of Unity in particular, is of interest to the present study and is even more complex than their ideological basis. This becomes clear if the nature of Unity's audiences, actors, producers and writers is considered.

### Audiences

To escape the censor Unity operated as a theatre club - at first in -Brittania Street in the premises John Lehmann refers to above, later

(by dint of vigorous fund-raising) in Goldington Street. Jon Clark indicates the class-basis of the membership:

"...the predominantly working-class audiences at Unity Theatre" 54

and this has been confirmed to me -

"...we were playing our stuff the whole time in front of working class audiences" 55

by John Allen, Unity director from late 1935. He goes on to describe an interesting development:

"(then) we launched out in a big way and really got what we we would now call the 'redical chic' to come to Britannia St... we actually had H G Wells... he was a little man, you know - he actually stood on his chair and waved his umbrella and shouted 'Strike!' at the end of Waiting for Lefty". 56

Writing in 1937 John Allen discussed the question of audience as follows:

"The political theatre, therefore, has to cater for two kinds of audiences, the 'unconverted', for whose benefit the political message must not be sugared but humanized; and the already converted, the politically conscious, who require entertainment in their plays so long as it is not at the expense of a clear political line. The Unity Theatre Club, therefore, pursues a double policy: the presentation of full length plays with a broad, almost liberal content, in its theatre in King's Cross; and that of short plays, sketches, burlesques, and mass recitations, with a more definitely left-wing content at political meetings, socials, rallies, etc. Such performances serve the fourfold purpose of training actors, spreading socialist ideas and opinions, taking plays to people who would never dream of buying a ticket for a theatre, and enlivening political meetings. The Unity Theatre Club has done an enormous amount of this kind of work, and the twofold activity I have described is being followed by groups all over England." 57

#### Actors, directors and writers

John Allen is also illuminating about the actors:

"Rebel Players were the immediate predecessors to Unity... so there was a long tradition of working-class acting - this was a working-class group, most of them came from the East End..." 58

and the directors

"what happened when the Rebel Players turned into Unity was that

they got hold of one or two quite distinguished West End professional directors, who themselves were very, very Left...

The actors continued to recruit from the working class, from the East End: I mean Joe Stern, Alfie Bass, Ron Chaney - they were all East End... and there was a very strong Jewish element in it, which I think accounted for a lot of the brilliance, of the sheer enormous intellectual vitality..."<sup>59</sup>

He goes on:

"And yet there was this curious tradition that with working-class actors the direction and the writing continued to be a middle class affair" <sup>60</sup>

adding that he, public-school educated, was very much part of that pattern.

There is a strong parallel here with a contemporary development in the U.S.A. In 1937 the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union mounted in New York a "left-wing, satirical revue" called Pins and Needles. This became a tremendous success: the "longest-running musical of the 1930s". However,

"Although the original cast members were all unknown garment workers the creators of Pins and Needles were professionals, some even well-known."<sup>61</sup>

Some of the writing for British Left theatre production was, inevitably, doctrinally heavy -

"... 'agit-prop' sketches of the purest and narrowest faith..." <sup>62</sup>

and this is implied in John Allen's caveat (written in 1937/1938):

"Paragraphs from Capital ...do not live on the stage merely by virtue of their excellent matter..."<sup>63</sup>

John Lehmann (1940) specifically exonerates Unity from this:

"Unity's programme has been much more interesting..." <sup>64</sup>

and mentions plays by Stephen Spender and Sean O'Casey, and productions of Russian and American revolutionary plays, citing the American cab-strike play Waiting for Lefty. This was Unity's 'blockbuster' success,

its 1930s centrepiece, and was performed over 300 times. (The length of this run is especially impressive when it is remembered that pre-world War II Unity generally staged performances on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays only). John Allen met its author, Clifford Odets, and remembers him as middle-class. These questions of the differential class status within Left Theatre as between audiences and actors on the one hand and writers and directors on the other are taken up in the following discussion of Hodge's involvement with Unity. Before that discussion, one further general remark about Unity, quoted from John Allen's 1937 piece:

"In January 1936 there was almost no theatrical activity among the British working classes at all. The Unity Theatre Club has risen within a single year from an organization with no assets except a few actors with stout hearts and a vigorous but undeveloped talent, to one that has its own theatre and equipment and two well-trained companies...The policy of the club has been uncompromising: vigorously to present plays which expose capitalism without attempting to disguise their purpose, and to take those plays to as wide an audience as possible." <sup>65</sup>

The year or so John Allen refers to was precisely the period of Herbert Hodge's involvement with Unity Theatre.

#### Herbert Hodge and Unity Theatre: 'Channel 2'

John Allen remembers his first contact with Herbert Hodge:

"One day Herbert Hodge came into Unity Theatre and said he wanted to write a play ... and he hadn't the first idea of how to set about it... We talked about writing plays... and it wasn't long before he came back with Where's That Bomb?" <sup>66</sup>

Hodge's own account fills this out interestingly. He had been invited by Unity's secretary to join the repertory committee to consider scripts for possible adoption. After his first script-reading attendance he left:

"...annoyed at wasting an hour's working time."

Apparently

"No one wrote socialist plays in England. Not real plays."



...As I cruised about the streets that night, I turned it over in my mind. I didn't know anything about the stage, but I thought I could at least write something as good as that manuscript. Once I got an idea, that was. The trouble was I hadn't one... then, one afternoon, when the noise at home was nerve-racking, what with the kids downstairs playing in the passage, and the grind of machinery in the factory next door, I found myself sitting in the water-closet, and thinking it was the only peaceful place in the house... then my eye fell on the toilet-paper and I had it." <sup>67</sup>

He worked on the idea and enlisted the help of Robert Buckland with writing some of the verse. It developed into a political satire:

"A starving poet, harried by debt-collectors for overdue instalments on his furniture, clothes, and so on, wrote a romance to be printed on toilet-paper - the perfect Hollywood magazine story with a jingo ending - the idea being to open the only door hitherto closed to capitalist propaganda, to invade the last stronghold of freedom. After writing the romance, the poet had a nightmare, and was visited by the Devil, "Money-Power," who brought his toilet-paper characters up from hell, and made them act their story. The poet couldn't stand it, the characters revolted and threw a bomb at the Devil, and the poet woke up just in time to refuse to sell his story and tell the debt-collectors to take their stuff back and be damned." <sup>68</sup>

John Allen

"thought it was a winner from the start...one of those scripts that had to have nothing done to it at all." <sup>69</sup>

Hodge takes up the story:

"Two (of the cast) were unemployed, but the rest worked all day in factories and offices...The Devil.... was a barber, and worked till eight at night, except on his half-day off. Saturday was the worst. The shop kept open until nine. It was at Ilford. I'd get down there with the cab about a quarter to nine, always hoping he might manage to get away early. Harry would see me outside, and shake his head...On the tick of nine, he'd come dashing out, and away we'd go hell-for-leather for King's Cross and Unity, where John would be waiting in the dressing-room ready to make him up. Fortunately he didn't come on until the second act. With a slight delay on the opening curtain, and a minute or two on the interval, we usually managed it without making the hold-up too obvious." <sup>70</sup>

Where's That Bomb? was a great success, playing to full houses.

For Unity at this time it was second only to Waiting for Lefty.

John Lehmann wrote:

Where's That Bomb? was written by two London taxi-drivers and was for long the real basis of Unity's native programme; it is an extremely amusing piece of working-class satire, and the performance was a delight. The theme is treated in crude, almost pantomime outline, but the humour is so high-spirited and at the same time so thoroughly English that it puts other propaganda pieces entirely in the shade." (My emphasis)<sup>71</sup>

T W M, in Reynolds News, wrote of

"...an entirely new note in Left-Wing propaganda ...Falstaffian humour... more effective than a million dreary speeches."

He added:

Where's That Bomb? will never be produced in a West End Theatre, but it will be rapturously applauded wherever people are familiar with unemployment, poverty and the seamy side of the hire purchase system."<sup>72</sup>

A cab-driver colleague, reviewing it in E T N (Nov 1936) gave it the enthusiastic reception which was usually, but not always (see below), to be accorded by colleagues to Hodge's work. About the play's success

Hodge remarks:

"We played to full houses for three weeks, Sundays included ... After a short break, we revived the Bomb again and went on playing to full houses."<sup>73</sup>

Interestingly, in the context of the present study, he adds:

"The fact that it was written by two taxidrivers probably helped the publicity."

Indeed this fact about the playwrights is mentioned in every account, contemporary and subsequent, of the play; and when Lawrence and Wishart published it in 1937 as A Comedy in Two Acts (with "Banned by the Lord Chamberlain" as a selling point)<sup>74</sup> it appeared pseudonymously. These facts have to be

evaluated within the context of an enterprise, Unity Theatre, whose collective ethic prohibited publication (pre-World War II) of actors' names in programmes (even when one of them was Paul Robeson), an enter-

prise whose working-class/socialist constituency are touched on elsewhere.

John Allen describes Hodge's effort:

"After the tremendous success of Where's That Bomb? Herbert then came back with Cannibal Carnival"<sup>75</sup>

Hodge described Cannibal Carnival as follows:

"It was about a bishop, a financier, and a policeman who were wrecked on a cannibal island, and set out to civilise the cannibals... Once the scene was set, of course, it became simply a satire on dear old England, with elections, coronations, unemployment and all the rest of it. The only difference was that the cannibals were able to satisfy their hunger and solve their political problems at one stroke by eating the bishop and the financier."<sup>76</sup>

This "full-length theatrical cartoon" blended elements of political satire, social realism, morality play and fantasy. After a production period of unusual difficulty (for example, the busmen's strike of 1937 led to Unity hastily staging free performances of Waiting for Lefty for the busmen, which robbed the play of most of its cast - of which more below) Cannibal Carnival opened. It got a mixed reception. Hodge wrote, a year later:

"Audiences' opinions were sharply divided. People either laughed themselves sick, or said it was so crude and vulgar it should never have been put on the stage... It has been revived several times since, with varying receptions. On the whole, the young enjoy it more than the old, and the Americans much more than the British. Americans, I suppose, are able to take a more detached view of British institutions. As I write, I hear they are doing it at Harvard."<sup>77</sup>

John Allen:

"I loved (it)... it was very unsuccessful... it was hated by the Left. I can remember John Lewis, who ran the Left Book Club, being extremely critical of it. He rang me up protesting about us having done it."<sup>78</sup>

Clues to John Allen's enthusiasm for Cannibal Carnival are implied in the following (1981) remarks -

"Now we have a far more, in some ways, sophisticated view of social reality, and that accounts for the enormous emphasis on social realism in the contemporary theatre - which actually rather bores me... There's far too little imagination, poetry and projection of the great themes of the times into altogether a richer theatrical imagery. That's what interested us very much in the old days..."<sup>79</sup>

and for both plays in the following, written in 1937:

"The various forms of isolation from which most of the middle-class writers are suffering today leads them to join left-wing political parties and identify their work with institutions that have some sort of roots in the life of the people. Composers veer between jazz and folk music, dramatists plump, like Auden has done, for the music hall. But whereas to my mind Auden has almost no connection whatsoever with this marvellous product of English theatrical genius, the work of Herbert Hodge has a close affinity. And I can think of no two writers whose work is more dissimilar than these two. Auden's is introvert and twisted, Hodge's extrovert and robust, Auden's exclusive, a thing of a class, Hodge's popular, a thing of the people. I have asked a great many members of the Unity Theatre Club, who are all working-class, what they think of Auden, and...The feeling is simply that he is speaking another language, writing for another class. He is the author of the dissatisfied bourgeoisie..."<sup>80</sup>

John Allen's and Unity's theatrical tendency at this time is strongly evoked in the experimental third and final project in which Hodge was involved: Living Newspaper No 1 - Busmen. This was "an ambitious collective theatrical and political experiment" in which Hodge joined John Allen, Montagu Slater and a number of other Unity members. Jon Clarke:

"The production was concerned with the background, events and lessons of the London busmen's strike of May 1937...The basic 'text' of the living newspaper was written by a collective under the chairmanship of John Allen, and then subsequently modified during rehearsals. It included monologues and dialogues, quotations from various meetings (House of Commons' debates, the union management negotiating committee, the Court of Inquiry as well as the executive council of the Transport and General Workers' Union), doggerel verses, various off-stage effects, projections and music as well as a poetic ballet of the industrial speed-up. The twenty-four scenes were linked by loudspeaker announcements from a chorus, the so-called 'voice of the living newspaper'." <sup>81</sup>

John Allen (1981) describes and reflects on the processes:

"When we did the 'newspaper' Busmen that was a genuinely co-operative effort in the sense that I was chairman, as it were, of a group of members of Unity Theatre and Montagu Slater and we worked out a scenario and... carved up the scenes between us - exactly like these collective creations do now in the alternative theatre all over Europe: send the actors away to research. Well we did this in 1936(sic). Then each person came back a week later with his ideas or whatever, Various people went out to interview....people in

bus queues; other people did some research about London Transport statistics, Montagu Slater wrote some poems (there was a very good one about a busman going frantic with that bell going 'ping' all the time in his ear... A lot of it... was very authentically naturalistic writing but it opened with a ballet of industrial speed-up...we were exploring those things then because we believed... that simply to write social realism, naturalistic plays, didn't help one to project the enormity of the whole working class struggle, the international war against fascism and so on..."

John Allen mentions Hodge's contribution as follows:

"Herbert wrote a scene or a couple of scenes of a busman with his wife".<sup>82</sup>

Busmen ran for a two-month period in the spring of 1938.

#### Herbert Hodge's experience with Unity: an evaluation

In what follows I speculate, first and briefly, on the characteristics of Unity as a 'channel' of publication for Hodge as a working-class writer; second, assess the importance for Hodge of his period of active involvement with a left theatre group.

As suggested above Unity's thrust was socialist; its members, actors and, initially, audience were predominantly working-class; its writers were middle class. Yet, as I shall suggest below, for a series of interlocking reasons, and in the context of various initiatives (e.g. the Left Book Club) in the late 1930s the hunt was on for working-class writers. This is both understandable and well-documented. It is implied in Margot Heinemann's remark:

"...any hope of uncovering good working-class poets ready-made remain stillborn."<sup>83</sup>

Clearly a romantic and unprofitable conception. Thus when Hodge appeared at Unity his class status allied to his manifest ability and energy would have made him twice welcome. There was more than one role he might play. There was, for example, a sort of consultancy role: checking that proposed representations of working-class life carried conviction. It is

significant that Hodge's role on Busmen was to render the busman's private, home life, where 'insider' class experience might be thought indispensable to achieving authenticity; on the other hand class 'outsiders' might get more or less 'right' the public, more generally visible aspects of a bus driver's life. John Allen recalls an incident that seems to confirm this:

"I can remember (Herbert) suddenly saying: 'I think you must make the busman say to his wife - "My dear, you give me the shit"'. I suppose I remember that very clearly because it slightly shocked me. Apart from Unity I hadn't mixed much with working-class people... I can just remember that actual expression taking me aback." <sup>84</sup>

Beyond all this, for the already considerably developed writer with a set of (up till then) unique class credentials, access to this 'channel' of publication was wide open and an altogether exciting proposition:

"Tommy Foster said we'd laid the foundations of the English working-class theatre." <sup>85</sup>

However, access was clearly conditional on more than intrinsic quality of play-writing: self-evidently any acceptable play must match Unity's socialist orientation:

"As long as people were writing stuff that seemed to us to express the socialist point of view we didn't actually worry whether they were working-class or not." <sup>86</sup>

Equally clearly, this presented no problem for Hodge. Yet it is worth mentioning because conditional/unconditional access (working-class socialist writing/working-class-but-not-necessarily-socialist-writing) is an issue that has considerably exercised and continues to exercise those active in working-class publishing initiatives since 1971. <sup>87</sup> Furthermore, the linked issue of policy and decision-making processes is usefully raised in the context of Hodge's Unity experience. From Hodge's experience with the repertory committee and the pioneering collectivity of the Living Newspaper projects it is clear that an impressively democratic decision-making process was in play. Yet one speculates that a disproportionate influence

would have been exerted by middle-class intellectuals and, especially, the professional middle-class directors John Allen mentions. Confident, educated, and well-placed to visualise the likely theatrical impact of plays under consideration for adoption, they must presumably have been difficult to out-argue. But this is no more than speculative: there is no evidence that Hodge suffered from a tendency that in the post-1971 context has been sloganised as 'working-class writers and middle-class managers.' <sup>88</sup>

These issues are worth mentioning as agenda-setting for later analysis of 'third moment' developments; they also usefully usher in an estimation of the importance to Hodge of his experience with Unity, part of which was his contact with people whose development in relevant respects at that time exceeded his own.

Everything about Hodge's involvement with Unity bespeaks a happiness, enthusiasm and fulfilment attendant on doing what you most want to be doing with entirely congenial companions. It also bespeaks the excitement of learning: of consciousness of growth - part self-generated, part nurtured from without, growth through contact with 'significant others', growth through participation in significant processes.

John Allen was pre-eminently important - in his encouragement, support and professionalism; he brought Hodge into the processes of staging Where's That Bomb? and Cannibal Carnival -

"Every night for nearly a month I left the cab outside the door for two or three hours while I watched and interfered with rehearsals... I learned more about play writing in those few weeks than I could have learned from instruction books in as many years...." <sup>89</sup>

and when Where's That Bomb? was published it was dedicated to John Allen. Hodge learned fast - a sort of forced growth in the urgency, nervousness and sheer contingency of play production under such circumstances. Reflect-

ing on how the 1937 bus strike led to the loss of the Cannibal Carnival

cast he remarks:

"I'd made the mistake of writing the principal parts with particular actors in mind. Incidentally, it's a fatal thing to do in an amateur company. It leads to jealousy and bad feeling all round. But that's by the way." 90

Most of all, perhaps, Hodge learned from the totality of Unity's collaborativeness, building on his earlier and simultaneous experiences of communal cab trade journalism. Writing in E.I.N. (December, 1937) he expresses his strong feelings about Unity. One aspect of the collectivity which clearly moved him he especially celebrates. When estimates were received for converting the Goldington Street Chapel the sums mentioned were three to four thousand pounds: well beyond the members' reach. Instead the "Trade Unionists of London... carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, painters, plumbers, hot-water fitters, electricians and labourers" did the job - in two months and so well that the result was

"one of London's most modernly equipped theatres."

(On the tradition of socialist hall-building see Brian Simon (1974, eg 220ff))

Describing A Comrade has Died, a dance drama about the Spanish Civil War performed by the Workers' Propaganda Dance Group he writes:

"...this experience finally settled the question of whether we should concentrate on art or propaganda in our workers' theatre. Here was art at its highest - artistic perfection striven for, I imagine, through months of gruelling rehearsals, until every individual and gesture fitted into the whole with superhuman precision. And yet - precisely because these dancers had concentrated upon their art, their performance had a hundred per cent propaganda value. We, their audience, neither saw nor heard propaganda as such. We lived in Spain. We experienced in our own persons the effects of Fascist invasion. "

While there are elements of this passage ("finally settled", "artistic perfection", "superhuman precision"), euphoric overstatements he might



went later to moderate, it does bespeak a crucial intellectual gain as well as the shock of its recognition.

In working with a left theatre group Hodge had discovered a second channel available to a worker writer of his time and situation; but he had discovered much more. He had achieved a degree of fame and had been, as subsequent developments were to suggest, noticed by an audience of fairly well-defined class and political constituency: much larger than the colleague-readership of C I N, though limited still.

Hodge 'takes off.'

Apart from what Herbert Hodge learned from his experience with Unity it seems clear that what happened to him, and the opportunities that cropped up as a result of it, were to influence decisively the paths he was now to take. In fact, the three years 1936-1939 can be seen as decisive in that it was then that Hodge gained access to four more of the 'channels' of publication (again in the broad sense) that were open, on certain conditions, to an able and energetic worker-writer at that historical conjuncture: Left Book-publishing; 'mainstream' general book publishing; review/magazine publishing; and the B B C.

In these three years Herbert Hodge published Where's That Bomb? (Lawrence & Wishart, 1937) and I Drive a Taxi (Fact magazine, No 1, January, 1939). These I seek to classify as Left publications ('channel 3'), a category to be explored at length in considering the work and experience of B L Coombes. In 1938 Hodge published It's Draughty in Front (Michael Joseph) and in 1939 Cab Sir? (Michael Joseph): 'mainstream, commercial publications aimed at and finding a substantial general readership ('channel 4'). In October, 1939 came an essay, 'The difficulties of the uneducated writer', in Life and Letters ('channel 5'). On September 22nd, 1937 he broadcast his first radio talk - 'Night Taxi', thus starting an association

with the B B C ('channel 6') that was to last into the 1950s. As we have seen he continued to contribute to Cab Trade News; and he continued throughout this period and throughout his working life to drive his cab. Clearly the proportions of his time spent on writing and allied activities on the one hand and on cab-driving on the other shifted constantly; as he was to put it in a letter (to Miss Fuller, BBC, 28 February, 1949):

"The position is this. I used to drive a taxi for a living and write in my spare time. Nowadays I write for a living and drive a taxi in my spare time...I enjoy both pastimes so much that I can't bear to give up either".

However, it is important to this study that he never gave up his primary work - and that for him, as for others after him, cab trade work arrangements allowed him the flexibility to exploit his opportunities.

Because a primary focus of my looking at the experience of Herbert Hodge is on his access to the channels of communication/publication then available, and because from 1937 he was doing so many different things at the same time, in what follows strict chronology is abandoned. My approach will be first to consider briefly the two books published by Michael Joseph (for those few I have encountered who are aware of his work at all these tend to be, for I think interesting reasons, what they most readily recall), then, even more briefly, I Drive a Taxi. Next I shall consider some pieces of 'mainstream' journalism and A Cockney on Main Street (1945), suggesting a place for the latter within what might be considered the minor genre of working-class, socialist travelogue. Finally, I shall examine his BBC experience: in some respects the most interesting part of his story and highly suggestive about working-class, socialist 'publication' in the 'second moment'. It's Draughty in Front ('Channel 3')

"... a straightforward, unpretentious and vivid piece of writing with a pleasant flavour of Cockney wit to it"...<sup>91</sup>

The final chapter of It's Draughty in Front begins with the pregnant sentence:

"Well, that's the record of my little life to date." (279)

Three points attract notice immediately: two to be made in passing, the third to be explored here.

Firstly, the informal, colloquial speech-like tone (signalled in the opening "Well" and the contraction "that's") will be familiar from the extensive use I have made of It's Draughty in Front in telling Hodge's story to this point.

Secondly, Hodge's use of "record" would make an admirable point of departure into the nature of autobiography in general. As autobiography was prominent in the nineteenth century and the later 1930s and is currently the dominant genre of working-class writing it is of interest to this study to explore the reasons for and implications of this tendency, and of what it means, generally, to publish one's autobiography. However, that discussion is perhaps best deferred to when it can draw on evidence from work in the 'third moment' of working-class writing.

Thirdly, deciding what to 'make of' "my little life" involves assessing just what sort of document It's Draughty in Front is.

The uncertainty here is as to how far "little life" is ironical. Does Hodge believe that a life of standing for parliament, rough living and hard travelling in Canada, writing successful plays and broadcasting - overcoming childhood privation and agonising family losses - is indeed "little"? Or is Hodge not, as I am inclined to believe, as aware as his reader that it is a story of one who has 'travelled' - and not merely on cross-

continental freights and in his taxi: a 'bootstrap' story of struggle and achievement without boasting but with a sub-text of quiet satisfaction, the whole gathering force from modest understatement? But beyond this, "little life" has a more important resonance: that has to do with why and how it came to be written and published, and how writer and publisher may have envisioned the readership.

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The title, It's Draughty in Front, provides the clue. Roughly one seventh of the book (the fifth seventh) deals specifically with becoming and being a cab driver. (The first four sevenths deal with child and adult life till the age of twenty seven; the final two sevenths with writing and broadcasting, with cab driving mentioned occasionally in the background, occasionally foregrounded for a few sentences). But the book proclaimed itself, and best-sold, as a cab driver's story. It was good 'book': nearly everyone takes a cab sooner or later - thus has some relevant experience to bring to the reading; cab drivers the world over are traditionally quoted by journalists (half seriously) as barometers of opinion; according to a familiar pattern cab drivers receive confidences as temporarily-close, 'intimate' strangers one will never see again; they are, ex-officio, privileged observers of human 'traffic', uniquely well-placed to sample a representative swathe of humanity. For all these reasons then, but centrally because cab drivers do not usually write books or star in them. Yet, arguably in terms of what proportionally the book deals with the title is misleading. It might, more legitimately, have been packaged as a 'bootstrap story:' 'garage-hand-to-broadcaster', 'delivery-boy-who-became-Parliamentary-candidate-and-hobnobbed-with-the-great', and so on. Again, the publisher's blurbs used later to recommend A Cockney on Main Street

foreground, in the review clips they use, the intrinsic qualities of the style and the man rather than the extrinsic aspects of his role. <sup>93</sup>

But there is no doubt that it is as a story of and by a cab-driver that the book owed its success - and its very existence. I can report, impressionistically, that anyone I meet who remembers the book tends to say: 'Oh yes, the cab-driver'. Significantly, Michael Joseph were ready, within a year of the best-seller success of It's Draughty in Front, to publish a full length book devoted entirely to cab driving. Around the same time Fact magazine took an interest in Hodge - as cab-driver - and published I Drive a Taxi. Revealingly (as I shall discuss below) Hodge's first broadcast talk had been entitled "Driving a London Taxi" (reprinted in The Listener, 20 October, 1937 with a photograph of cab driver 3306, Herbert Hodge. Interestingly, semiologically, the photograph heading Hodge's column in C T N had him in a lounge suit with natty folded handkerchief in top pocket). <sup>94</sup> By January, 1939, the C T N reviewer of I Drive a Taxi

could write:

"I suppose it would be pretty safe to say that Herbert Hodge is the world's most famous taxi-driver. His voice is known, through **the** radio, to millions throughout the British Empire and the U S A, and, by the same medium, London's taxi-drivers, as a whole, have received world-wide publicity."

Equally powerful evidence of the importance of the cab-driving leitmotif to Hodge's success can be retrieved from the modes of address, and assumptions about readership, of It's Draughty in Front. The readership of the hard-backs of 'mainstream' publishers is likely to have been, and to remain <sup>95</sup> now, overwhelmingly middle-class. Thus not only is cab-driving (in

It's Draughty in Front and, especially, Cab Sir?) anatomised for 'outsiders'

but also - in something approaching an anthropological spirit - working-class life. For example he sketches what from the 'inside' it is like to be a personal servant (chauffeur) (157-159), offering a case history - his - and the conclusion he draws from it:

"In a democratic state, where all citizens are supposedly born free and equal, the only solution of the servant problem is to have no servants. No personal servants, that is; no valets, lady's maids, household slaveys and the like. The only happy servants possible in a democratic community are public servants.

The barber and the pants presser must replace the personal valet; the taxidriver the private chauffeur; the service-flat cleaner the household drudge. Only in this way can a servant's life be made tolerable for any but the innately servile."<sup>96</sup>

And working-class love (in unconscious self-parody):

"Often we watched the sun rise as we walked home, grimy with road-dirt and scented with paraffin; very tired, and extraordinarily content in each other; When will the poets sing of love in the workshop? Man and woman, comrades and fellow-workers. That's the real romance. That's the living Adam and Eve. But maybe it's an unpoetic subject, for we didn't talk of love as we walked home - only of the morning sky and breakfast."<sup>97</sup>

And Hodge makes a very acceptable sherpa. For one thing, he speaks the ('middle-class') language: of allusion,<sup>98</sup> for example:

"If the child is father to the man (sic)...."<sup>99</sup>

"And so, once again, I found myself back on the cab, full of good resolutions to cultivate the inner light and have done with kicking against the pricks";<sup>100</sup>

and, recalling his mother:

"Let us then be up and doing with a heart for any fate, "

she said.

I said a rude word and got a box on the ear."<sup>101</sup>

In summary, the writing, publication and best-seller success of

It's Draughty in Front - a book written by a working-class writer for a

(predominantly) middle-class readership, an 'insider' account of characteristically hidden experiences published because of its novelty, suggests something about the characteristic legitimations of book publishing and the class constituency of book readership in the late 1930s. These issues will be developed in the consideration of the experience of B L Coombes.

Before leaving It's Draughty in Front a word needs to be said about how the book struck cab-driver ('insider') colleagues, how it struck an 'outsider' - an anonymous reviewer for the magazine Cavalcade (20 August, 1938) - how it strikes a modern reader and about its place in Hodge's development.

From my informal chats with cab-drivers who recall reading It's Draughty in Front (above forty years ago) what emerges, impressionistically, is that Hodge 'got it about right'. Of contemporary colleague readers Stanley H Owens, the managing editor, devoted six columns of C T N to It's Draughty in Front in September, 1938. The following extracts from Owens's review convey its flavour:

"It is rarely that a trade journal has the opportunity of hailing a "best-seller" written by a member of the trade which it serves... part of Herbert belongs to us and part of us has written a book... Much of the fascination to cabmen in reading these trade chapters will lie in the exciting search for a weakness or error... I pronounce them flawless... if Herbert could not rely on his own experiences regarding any particular point, he had the whole of the resources of the Cab Section of the Union at his disposal..."our" book is damn good, well written, and intensely interesting. After all, it is partly "ours" because, if the collective "we" didn't exist, half the story would be missing."

The content and tone of the Cavalcade review, and its relevance to the present study, seem to require no comment, except perhaps the remark - 'plus ça change...'

"This book is called the autobiography of a London taxi-driver. It might just as well be the autobiography of any one of the so-called 'ordinary' people, who have realised the commercial possibilities of cashing in on their experiences in life by writing a book. It is written in the accepted style, variously called by reviewers 'startlingly frank', 'ingenuous', or just 'crude'. Present writer has done all the things necessary to qualify for the autobiographical adventure. He spent his childhood in extreme poverty, has been at various times an errand boy, a laundry-carman, an unemployed agitator (he later saw the 'error' of his ways), a lumberman, a fire-hand, a builder's labourer, a shop-assistant, and a garage manager. He has written satirical plays, one of which, titled 'Where's that Bomb', caused the critics to dub him 'the Noel Coward of the Left', led to his being invited by the B B C to broadcast his views on modern satirists."

In telling Hodge's story so far I have drawn heavily on It's Draughty in Front; perhaps something of its flavour will already have been conveyed. It seems to me an impressive piece of sustained writing. The work of a thirty-seven year old working cab-driver it is maturely written with admirable clarity and a rarely-flawed simplicity of style. It shows mastery of the technical conventions of writing and the evidence from elsewhere (for example, from letters written to B B C colleagues) suggests that the technical 'correctness' of the presentation needed no editorial intervention. Hodge here is somewhat one-paced, sometimes treating relatively uninteresting phases of his life (for example, the Canadian experience) at too great length; at times argument and opinion become preaching. But for the most part It's Draughty in Front holds the interest. Packaged as the story of a cab-driver - claiming typicality, and conceded it by the C I N review - it is in fact the untypical story of an extraordinary man



who relates extraordinary experiences. In terms of Hodge's Progress, perhaps the biggest gain was the move to addressing a much larger, more heterogeneous and much less known audience.

### 1939

1939 was a productive year. In January Hodge published a 65-page monograph 'I Drive a Taxi' in Fact (No 22). A few months later came Cab, Sir?, a full length hard-back published by Michael Joseph, who had published It's Draughty in Front. In October he contributed an article 'Difficulties of the Uneducated Writer' to Life and Letters Today (October, 1939). All the while 1939 was proving one of his busiest years with the B B C. And there was, of course, his cab-driving...

'I Drive a Taxi' and Cab, Sir? are linked by more than chronology. Treating them closely together - and, where appropriate, exploring comparisons - promises to illuminate both. Consideration of 'Difficulties of the Uneducated Writer' - an impressive attempt at analysing and generalising his (chiefly language) problems - is perhaps best delayed till it can be looked at alongside the remarks on language questions he makes in narrating the story of his early work with the B B C.

### Fact

"... a period when the left placed great emphasis on factual accounts of working-class experience..."

Carol Snee 'Working-class literature or proletarian writing?' in Clarke, 1979, p 182.

The first monthly number of Fact had appeared in 1937. In an insert leaflet the general editor, Raymond Postgate, introduced the

project as follows:

"Fact, in fact, is a book-magazine. It is the size and shape of a Penguin book; it contains about 100 pages; each issue is a study of permanent value, and it costs only 6d. Never before have the intelligent critics of the world been catered for in this way.

We take no notice of bans imposed by the Left or the Right. Our object is to provide the writers, the scientists, the artists, and the political Socialists with the material they need to deal with delusions as well as with dictators. The names of our Contributing Editors are a real enough guarantee of the character of the studies that we shall print. All the issues of Fact will be commissioned, approved, and, if necessary, revised or rewritten (my emphasis) by the Contributing Editors...<sup>103</sup>

Each number will contain, not merely an important study of some 20,000 words, but a survey of the month, and a number of book reviews which will give you up-to-date information about what is worth reading in every subject". (Again my emphasis).

After Margaret Cole's opening number, No 2 (May, 1937) was

'I Joined the Army' by Private XYZ. Both sold out very rapidly; the latter, with a cover of blue, white and green, "the colours of the British Republic...flag...designed and adopted in the later days of the Chartist movement" (Fact 2, May 1937, 5), caused in Coronation Year <sup>104</sup> a considerable stir, "spiteful press attacks and the attempt <sup>105</sup> at censorship."

No 4 was entitled 'Writing in Revolt: Theory and Examples'. To read this ~~is, as~~ with the document already quoted, to get a sense of the urgency, optimism, preoccupations, general approach, cast of thought - and as seen from the perspective of the 1980s, perhaps occasional naivete - of a group of influential Left intellectuals, writers and activists of the late 1930s.

Postgate's editorial starts with an account of early sales exceeding all expectation. He goes on (in terms familiar to students of the contemporary phenomenon Mass Observation) energetically to sketch out the latest plans for Fact:

"As a result of this success we have been encouraged to take on... nothing less than to begin a social and anthropological survey of typical parts of Britain... Suppose, instead of going to work one day without reflecting on what was before you, you were to watch and listen, to observe the buildings, the dress, the habits, the conversation, the food and the taboos of your fellows as conscientiously as if you were walking for the first time into an African village. What would you see? and what would you, a new Dr Livingstone, think could be made of this tribe? Any answers to these questions must certainly be based on a firm knowledge of the basic facts of unemployment, housing and wages to which our eyes have always been turned. But more than that is needed; it is an impartial vision of the results of these conditions upon the minds and hopes of those who live under them. Often enough these results are not entirely what politically-minded people like ourselves imagine them to be. Our first subject will be a small mining town... We hope to follow this up with a portrait of a farming village, of a suburban district, of a fishing port, and several others...

In our first number we published a study of hotel conditions by a manager. This has excited such interest that we have reprinted it as a pamphlet, Behind the Swing Door; and we have presented 2,000 copies to the Transport Workers Union and 1,000 to the National Union of Distributive Workers as our contribution to their campaign for organising hotel and restaurant workers." 106

(I have quoted this editorial because I feel it (a) pre-eminently conveys the 'flavour' (of the project and of the time) alluded to above and -- affords a strong sense of how Postgate imagined his readership; (b) raises questions about political and cultural activity that will be

taken up and explored later; (c) helps characterise the kind of project to which Hodge was to contribute.

Postgate's editorial ushers in a number that is divided into two: Part 1 entitled "Theory"; Part 2 "Examples". In Part 1 there are short pieces on "Fiction" (Arthur Calder-Marshall), "Theatre" (John Allen), "Poetry" (Stephen Spender) and "Documents" (Storm Jameson). Each spends time on issues of the relationship between politics and art: what socialist writing might be like, and so on; Storm Jameson's piece bears especially on the kind of enterprise Fact seeks to be.

While denying that "socialist literature ought to concern itself only or mainly with working-class life... it does not matter where you open up the social body if you know what you are looking for" <sup>107</sup>

Storm Jameson stresses nevertheless the value of making public the reality of working-class lives, offering in passing a cameo in which one senses a frisson unmistakably of her time and circumstances:

"the middle-class writer who hears the command to sell all he has and write a proletarian novel... discovers that he does not even know what the wife of a man earning two pounds a week wears, where she buys her food, what her kitchen looks like to her when she comes into it at six or seven in the morning... If he happens to have been born and brought up in Kensington the chances are that he has never lifted the blind of his own kitchen at six in the morning, with thoughts in his mind of tumbled bed-clothes, dirty grates, and the ring of rust on the stove." <sup>108</sup>

In addition, she is clear as to what should not be involved in presenting this reality. In Fact No 2 she had reviewed The Road to Wigan Pier, finding the first part "a social document as vivid, bitter, and telling as one could have asked" but the second marred by Orwell's "taking an intense interest in his own state of mind." <sup>109</sup> Here Storm Jameson

counsels her well-meaning middle-class writer in similar terms.

"The first thing a socialist writer has to realize is that there is no value in the emotions, the spiritual writhings, started in him by the sight, smell, and touch of poverty. The emotions are no doubt unavoidable. There is no need to record them." 110

Rather,

"He must go for the sake of the fact, as a medical student carries out a dissection, and to equip himself... We need... detailed and accurate presentment, rather than the representation, of this moment, and this society... Writers should be willing to go, if you like, into exile." 111

She goes on to contrast what is needed with detached, superficial reports, like that "made by two women doctors to the Council of Action on Motherhood in the Special Area of Durham and Tyneside":

"They are not documents in the proper sense of the word; they are not full enough; they do not give the essentials of speech and action. They could not: the observation, however acute, is made from outside, too briefly, and as a stranger would report upon strangers after an hour's visit. We do not see the women stripping the filthy, bug-ridden wallpaper from the thin wall of her attic; nor the pregnant woman waiting her turn for the lavatory which serves eight families (forty people). Perhaps the nearest equivalent of what is wanted exists already in another form in the documentary film. As the photographer does, so must the writer keep himself out of the picture while working ceaselessly to present the fact from a striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle." 112

All this is illuminating in a number of ways. Firstly, it is a telling critique of tendencies within 'outsider' 'anthropological' enquiries into working-class experience - though it suggests unconsciously that the writer's personal feelings are not eliminated from the account by adopting an 'objective', 'documentary' stance. 113 Secondly, in stressing the quarrying and "presentment" of facts, while she refers to the need to present them from a "striking (poignant, ironic, penetrating, significant) angle", there is a positivistic over-confidence

in the autonomy of the fact and an underestimation of mediations upon it (including the place of the writer in "the picture"). Thirdly, it is interesting that although she, in her review of The Road to Wigan Pier has contrasted Part Two unfavourably with the stark absence of self in Walter Hannington's Unemployed Struggles -

"When he is arrested and goes to prison he tells us what was going on outside while he was there. He played a leading part in the movement he describes but he doesn't play lead in his own book... an account, rigorously factual..." - 114

throughout her article and that review she seems to assume that in the nature of things there will be, in documenting working-class experience, (a few) writers and an immense majority of non-writers, with whom the former have to come "into relation". And yet, paradoxically, Fact had already published 'Private XYZ' and was before long to publish Hodge, Coombes and other working-class writers. It seems, to anticipate what will be explored later in this chapter and in dealing with B L Coombes, and by way of placing on the 'agenda' of consideration of the 'third moment' the nature of assumptions about working-class writing, that Hodge and others tended to be seen as witnesses, providers of evidence 'on oath' about their (typical ?) working-class experience, testators who might then be expected to 'stand down', but not as 'writers' with personal histories and personal lives, points of view, political stances, as well as the writerly craft-tasks of selection, shaping, presentation, getting better at all these - and undergoing personal transformation in the process. It would be, half a century on and from within an entirely different context of ideas about writing, writers and class (for all the uncanny resemblances of economic, social and political context as between the 1930s and the 1980s), unhistoric to

condemn Storm Jameson for her assumptions about the divisions of documentary labour. The point is merely that if my analysis carries conviction it will assist the later task of identifying what, relative to the past, is different and what is not about post - 1971 developments in working-class writing and its conceptualisations.

A glance at the list of Fact titles and authors (Appendix Three) suggests that by its second year it was still very much the exception for working-class people to write for this brainchild of a segment of the Left intelligentsia. For Hodge, seizing the opportunity to write 'I Drive a Taxi' meant breaking new ground: writing within a socialist project and addressing a limited readership - as in his work for *Unity*, but with the difference that the audience was predominantly composed of middle-class 'outsiders'.<sup>115</sup> This channel of communication for working-class writers - i.e. within Left projects conceived as part of programmes of political action and dominated at the levels of production and consumption by the middle-class Left - was arguably the most salient and significant in the late 1930s (a point I shall develop in discussing B L Coombes).

'I Drive a Taxi' ('Channel 4') and Cab, Sir? cover similar ground. Both attempt to tell the story of cab-driving and the London cab-trade; both, as a glance at their respective 'Contents' pages shows (see Appendix Four), employ the interesting device of taking the reader through a 24-hour period of cab-driving experience:

"This chapter covers briefly twenty-four hours of London cabbage. No man, of course, works twenty-four hours consecutively, and no man is likely to have all the incidents

described here happen to him on the same day...But throughout the twenty-four hours some of us are always working, and on any given day similar incidents are happening to each one of us. What follows, therefore, is not the record of any one day, but the concentrated essence of all my days." 116

This bold structural decision goes beyond merely the ordering of material: rather it suggests a different impulse, a writer seeking to break out of the shackles of a factual narrative that cannot wholly serve his purposes. I shall later seek to argue that B L Coombes makes, unannounced, a similar 'fictive' move when constrained by the terms of the 'legitimation' of himself as a 'testator' within the Left project that was giving him a readership. However, it is the differences between 'I Drive a Taxi' and Cab Sir? that are most interesting and to my present purpose.

#### Cab Sir?

"As I pass Knightsbridge Station, a man in evening dress calls me. He only wants to go round the corner. He's probably come from Hampstead or another suburb by tube, but wants to arrive at the door looking as though he's come all the way by taxi." 117

"I suppose my own face must be known to hundreds of cabmen, yet they never betray so much as a flicker of recognition when I hire a cab with a friend." 118

"Paddington, on the lips of a perfect lady, becomes "Bayswater"; "Fulham", "South Kensington"; "South Acton", "Bedford Park"; and "Piccadilly", "Belgravia". 119

Cab Sir? is packed with a hundred details - fascinating and impressive as are the 'insider' experiences of any unfamiliar world - packed with 'human interest' stories, many of them funny. There is an affectionate discussion of the language that, like most working communities, the cab-trade generates ("'copperarse', the driver who



works long hours, who can sit in the cab longer than most"); 120

a careful explanation of the economic realities around

the tipping issue; well-researched accounts of cab-trade law and history. Most important, as with Lew Lessen's 1977 account of barbering, 121 Hodge provides a comprehensive account of his profession as preeminently a set of complex social skills. The book tends to confirm the folk-view of the cab-driver as - by virtue of the rich sample of humanity encountered, though, as is freely conceded, a sample skewed towards the better-off - privileged observer of the human scene, and to imply, again as with the barber, a modest claim to authority. 122

Throughout, the observation is acute. Cab Sir?, like It's Draughty in Front, is chiefly for 'outsider' middle-class hard-back readers.

It opens with (slightly pretentious?) quotations from Horace Walpole (the old chestnut about the world being "a comedy to those that think" etc.) and William Blake's poem 'London'; it often features the kind of ripeness and allusiveness of style noted in respect of It's Draughty in Front; it ends with two passages of naive honesty; penultimately with the remark that 'Blake's Nebuchadnezzar eating grass in the Tate' has more reality than twenty years' observation in a cab; ultimately in confiding a "moment of vision", of "almost knowing" that however tonally it might jar with the broad thrust of the book, however much it invites parody (mystic cab-driver etc), carries conviction:

"Summer afternoons, for instance, when I've been driving my empty cab down the slope into the back of Victoria Station, and caught a glimpse of the whole station from above, the crowds, cars, porters, and moving trains, all in a golden haze that comes of a mixture of sun and smoke. An instant I've felt myself on the brink, then I've been down the slope

in the middle of the bustle, and lost it again. And yet not quite lost it, because for a few moments longer, before the inevitable worry about whether I should find a job has swamped it, I've been conscious of a vague memory of sensing life complete - complete and good." 123

F R Argent, warmly reviewing Cab Sir? in Cab Trade News (June, 1939)

- a cab-driver writing for cab-drivers - emphasised the typical rather than the personal in paying it a neat, understated compliment, that sports a rare brand of irony:

"Let me warn you that you'll find little that is "new" in the book; the incidents Herbert describes have happened to all of us at some time or another."

#### 'I Drive a Taxi'

'I Drive a Taxi', designed as part of the kind of project Raymond Postgate and Storm Jameson had theorized, contrasts with Cab, Sir? in its selections, emphases, silences, ordering of material, sense of purpose and of readership - and sometimes stylistically. It opens with remarks about drivers - their motives (e g sense of freedom compared with employment alternatives),<sup>124</sup> class composition etc. Much of this appears in Cab, Sir? - at least one sentence is reproduced word for word (on page 255 of the latter); the difference is in the salience accorded. The same can be said for the inclusion of his best stories. They are, thankfully, there - like this from his days "on the knowledge" (here, with a ponderous irony devised especially for this new sort of readership, dubbed "Cabman's College"):

"We had to cover every inch of the ground, and get our knowledge from personal observation. Many questions were framed especially to catch the map-readers."

One man drove his imaginary cab along Waterloo Place and straight down the Duke of York's steps into the Mall." 125

But as a rule the anecdotes are in the interstices, to help, as here, to make a serious point:

"I believe most of the applicants give up in despair. The examination would be difficult enough if they had money. But the majority have only the dole, and if they don't own a bicycle every mile of their journeying has to be done on foot, exhausting work on an undernourished stomach." 126

Hodge's inclusions generally are significant and suggestive. There are passages exploring the symbiosis, the ecologies of the working world:

"I put my cab on somewhere roundabout Eccleston Square and gradually feed down. At the blind corners, where the separate sections are too far apart to keep in touch, there's a 'looker-out'. He waves up the cabs from one section to the other, and collects a copper or two from the drivers as they pass him." 127

"By this time, the dustbins have appeared on the pavement... At three, or thereabouts, the big motor dustcarts...will come round and empty them. But before they arrive other men, and sometimes women, with sacks over their shoulders, sneak, soft and intent as cats, along the pavements, gently lift the lids..." 128

The most remarkable example of this is the six and more pages devoted to the mutual dependence of cab-driver and prostitute - starting with the slickly introductory:

"For the night-taxi-driver, it's love that makes the wheels go round"

proceeding via a period comparison:

"she's well-upholstered, and as gaudy as a super-cinema tea-room"

through an access of disgust:

"When they've gone indoors, I look inside the cab just to make sure everything's all right. The stench of stale beer and cheap scent makes me gag. I drop the hood and drive round the houses to give the cab an airing..."

While I'm waiting I try not to think of those two in that house. But imagination won't lie down. I decide I'll never be able to go with a woman again. But after a few minutes, it wears off. Then another couple walk across to me, and I'm off again".

and culminating in a striking analogy:

"Bond Street, Sackville Street, Burlington Gardens and Piccadilly. Round and round they go. And the cabs go round and round too. So there's a sort of fellow feeling between us. We're both plying for hire; both wondering whether we'll take enough to pay the rent; both perking up every time a white shirt front comes in sight. Come along White Shirt-Front! You've got the price in your pocket. Nice taxi, sir? Nice girl, sir?" <sup>129</sup>

The lyricism surfaces less often than in Cab Sir?, sometimes, as follows, embarrassingly, and less suggestive of Blake than of Tin Pan Alley:

"Involuntarily, or subconsciously, I am making gradually toward Berkeley Square, attracted by the thought of the old oaks in the early hours of the morning. The square is quiet then. There are only the trees and the grass and me. Richly lit by the tall standards, the grass grown a fresher green than in the dusty daytime. And the oaks are ageless. A quiet smoke, leaning on the railings and gazing into that green-brown pregnancy, is like a cool bath after a day in the desert. And the trees comfort me, knowing so much more than I do."

Throughout, class, political and economic analyses are foregrounded - and tougher. The passage quoted above leads into the following:

"I hear the thudding rhythms of a dance band...There's a 'Do' in one of the few remaining private houses.

There may be a job here...Leaning on the railings, I try to calculate the probable number of people compared with the number of cars...They go sedately; the men with pouter pigeon breasts of shining white...The words are indistinguishable - only their assurance can be heard. The complacent 'yaap, yaap, yaap,' of Oxford, Sandhurst and Belgravia." 130

A later passage is of especial interest to any consideration of the development of Hodge's thinking and/or perhaps to his sharpening sense of the kind of readership that might be expected to buy and read Fact.

Its full significance emerges only by comparison with something he had said in one of his earliest BBC talks: 'Night Taxi' (September, 22nd, 1937). Referring to a derelict old woman dossier he had remarked:

"Now what can you do with an old woman like that? If I'd given her the price of another bed she'd have only spent it in drink. Her sort will always be useless outcasts, condemned by all right-thinking people."

Referring to "this now-famous reference" Stanley Owens (C I N October, 1937) reprimanded Hodge:

"I think that a more sane and healthy system of living would breed out (my emphasis) her sort and I think all right-thinking people should condemn the system (Owen's emphases) and work ceaselessly to find a cure for the individual."

In 'I Drive a Taxi', Hodge recalls one wet night obliging a charitable 'fare' who asked him to give half a crown to a man dossing on a seat, covered by newspaper placards, in the Bayswater Road. The 'man' had turned out to be two women - the younger of whom had taken her 1/3d and gone off in search of a bed while the older watched in contempt:

"'Bed!' she said. 'I know what I'm going to do with mine, when the pubs open. Good night, mate! And down she went under the placards again. I could have hugged her.'" 131

The marked contrast with his earlier attitude suggests a growth of under-

understanding and empathy.

Hodge devotes his penultimate chapter to the relationship between cab-drivers, the police (and the Public Carriage Office), and his final one to analysing the economy and economic realities and relationships of the cab-trade: the remoteness of the possibility, even given working seven days a week, of a driver without capital operating his own cab. Hodge floats as a solution the idea of a 'Cabman's Co-op' - which he had been involved in in the past and a later version of which was currently developing in N W London. He ends:

"To my mind, the ideal method of running London cabs is a co-operative monopoly, with every driver a shareholder, and government control over fares and vehicles as at present. But though it's an idea worth talking about and working for, I'm afraid it's much too ideal to be practical politics at the moment." <sup>132</sup>

If Cab, Sir? and 'I Drive a Taxi' show significant differences - adaptations to perceived readerships and project purposes which mark Hodge's growing maturity as a writer - they show in common a sense of writerly confidence, new sureness of touch that comes from dealing with subject-matter entirely familiar. Cab, Sir? shows the benefit of relevant experience in producing It's Draughty in Front; 'I Drive a Taxi's uncertainties perhaps suggest unfamiliarity with a predominantly middle-class, Left intellectual readership.

#### A Cockney on Main Street

This, Herbert Hodge's last book, was published, by Michael Joseph, in 1945. It is an account of a nine-month lecture tour of North America (1942 - 1943) undertaken at the invitation of the American

Workers' Education Bureau, via the Ministry of Information. The invitation came at a good time. Hodge was working as a bus driver -

"I itched to do some "real" warwork.... in my present mood, cabdriving seemed too much like waiting on the well-to-do. So I decided to have a go at bus work. It was "real" work, all right, and it appealed to me as a neat transfer of my own particular skill. Driving a bus I could carry more than ten times as many people as in a cab... If I was looking for hard work, I had certainly found it..."

The work effectively stopped his writing:

"it put a damper on the questing mind. Bus and bed were about my limit. A short article or a radio talk was the weary labour of weeks. And the time came when even the occasional talk had to stop... I got so that I gradually felt no desire to write, 133 or even to read. It was enough that the bus should run to time..."

If the invitation to America was welcome, guidance as to what to lecture on was scant:

"the whole of Britain appeared to be my subject."

Initially,

"Several carefully planned speeches, dealing with Britain in general, were politely received, but I knew instinctively 134 that I hadn't made more than superficial contact with my audience."

Eventually things came right at a big, boozy, rowdy meeting of manufacturers working for the War Production Board in the Middle West. It dawned on Hodge he might draw on his experience as street corner orator and that:

"They didn't want an academic lecture about life in Britain; they wanted to feel it...feel the sensation of an air-raid, feel being underneath the arches at Shadwell, feel coming 135 back along the street at dawn to find a wrecked home...."

From this point the tour, and the book, roll forward. Here it is perhaps useful to distinguish two major aspects of both: first, Hodge's account of his actual travels, output, lecturing - what he told the

Americans; second, his intellectual 'travels', input - what he learned.

As regards the former, worth noting is, perhaps, the professional eye he runs over the cab-world - of New York City:

"I thought at first the driver was annoyed about something, but when I got into conversation with him he was very friendly, and subsequent experience taught me that this was merely the normal manner of driving in New York" <sup>136</sup>

and of Detroit:

"...it seemed as near the ideal taxi system as anyone has yet been able to get - both from the taxi driver's and the customer's point of view"; <sup>137</sup>

and the bus worlds of Omaha (vehicles, wages and conditions all good) and of Detroit (vehicles excellent but the newly-introduced single-manning dangerous and stressful). All in all Hodge, working within what has become a familiar 'sub-genre' (writing up a coast-to-coast North American lecture-tour), describes with an engaging sense of wonder and hunger for experience, though a flagging euphoria, a tour-schedule no whit less eventful and exhausting than those, ever multiplying, of writers, <sup>138</sup> academics and others, before him and since.

The second aspect brings A Cockney on Main Street into relation with another 'sub-genre' that flourished, especially between the wars - though it characteristically faced East rather than West.

### Socialist-pilgrimage travelogue

In the past couple of centuries there have been a number of celebrated visits, undertaken with high hopes and expectations, to burgeoning new societies. Tom Paine, Cobbett and Dickens ("It is not the republic of my imagination") to America; Shaw and Malcolm Muggeridge <sup>139</sup> (thumbs up and thumbs down, respectively) to U S S R - these spring



readily to mind. Obscure, less celebrated, have been the steady stream of working-class visitors - chiefly trade union delegations and chiefly to the Soviet Union (November - giving way to May Day delegations). Sponsored latterly by bodies such as the British Soviet Friendship Society, delegates are chosen and financed by trade union colleagues, to whom they report in writing on their return. Two examples one from the 1930s, the other involving London cabmen, are given as Appendix 5 and perhaps suggest the pattern.

There was, then, a well-established if obscure tradition of working-class, socialist observers reporting on visits abroad, mainly to the Soviet Union, reflecting and speculating on the lessons to be drawn.

In what he spent time exploring and what he chose to write about, Hodge's book can be seen as within this tradition. What distinguished A Cockney on Main Street from the mainstream were the kind of visit Hodge undertook, the country visited and the nature and conditions of production and consumption of his 'report'.

#### Hodge's 'report'

Within the constraints of the chronology and geography of the tour Hodge takes some bold structural decisions - for example, to start 'in medias res': narrating his hasty preparations for, and actual departure from Britain, crossing a wartime Atlantic, arrival in New York City, before filling in the background and introducing himself as if when he at last has time to collect his thoughts (chapter four). Hodge develops a flexible, organic form: experiences giving rise to reflection and discussion; chapter structure governed sometimes by unity of place, sometimes by unity of theme. The book is unobtrusively researched. Hodge

describes and analyses situations from a well-informed base but wears lightly a considerable knowledge - for example, of American labour legislation. Although there is clear evidence of the research effort he has made (for example, the correspondence conducted with Captain Beatty, founder of the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council, page 95) there is no intimidating apparatus. Hodge is a thoughtful, comfortable companion who can mention books (King Coal by Upton Sinclair, page 102; Without Armour by James Hilton, page 140, are examples) without the awkwardness of our feeling he is trying to impress or improve us.

Hodge's account of what he met is soberly balanced. Besides these remarks on New York City and the Empire State Building (resonating how differently, forty years on!)-

"It is the city of tomorrow: fit for men like gods. I'd be willing to do a great deal for the privilege of living on that 102nd floor " 140

are passages describing something unforgettable seen in the Middle West:

"...a social gathering...consisting of Negroes and Asiatics, now standing huddled in groups, with their eyes fixed on us - scared, ingratiating, defiant, slinking; a camera study for an Eisenstein... The squalor was bad: the filthy rooms, the frowzy beds, the human shapes crouched in dark corners... the oddments of food, old clothes, pillows and empty food tins that littered the floors - it was all much worse than anything I've seen in a London slum " 141

and in Kansas City:

"rotten and insanitary..hovels". 142

In Detroit Hodge reports on the propaganda war and bitter aftermath of the struggle "between the C I O Auto Workers' Union and General Motors, and with Henry Ford"; on the "mass production executives" he met there:

"It seemed to me, too, that some ...had gone machine mad...the fact that, on top of the natural drawback of having to stop for long periods to sleep and eat, this unit of energy actually went out of its way to build up organizations to express its will, was an evil and monstrous outrage - a filthy insult to the exquisitely beautiful machines." 143

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and on their "deep racial hatred". There is a readable account of the U S labour unions and labour relations in the Roosevelt era, a discussion of the racketeering around American labour unions, closed shops and monopolies - and a sharp distinction between U S and British unions:

"...prior to the rise of the C I O, ideas of social reform played little part in the official philosophy of American unionism. The old American craft unions lacked our co-operative, socialistic and reformist leadership...Officially, many unions made a virtue of the fact that they were not concerned with improving the social system. The object of most of the older craft unions was no more than that of the capitalist combine - more money for their own members, and to hell with everybody else...To my mind, the greatest weakness of the American labour movement has been its lack of direct political representation." 145

Hodge develops this theme - the necessity for political action if any significant social/economic change is to be achieved - in the most interesting discussion in the book. While in Kansas City he was told about the community work, in the area of the stockyards, of the Armourdale Neighbourhood Council. To deal with social misery in a context of "urban anonymity" (the result of people being compelled by the needs of industry to live in "larger and ever larger communities - the sheer fact of scale tending to drive people into little individual worlds" and to reduce "social objectives, social welfare, the good

of the nation, the democratic way of life" to the status of "nebulous, meaningless, sterile phrases")<sup>146</sup> certain energetic individuals had created a "spontaneous organization" to tackle the immediate problems of the neighbourhood. Throughout, they insisted on its being non-political - making a virtue of its being so. Hodge had been shown some houses, newly painted in the hope/belief that the inhabitants would take a pride in their homes, and the environment beyond - and gain in self respect. Hodge, while perhaps his own taste was for small-scale action -

"...if you are going to make democracy work, the only place to begin is right in your own street..." -

recognised, as indeed was pointed out to him by his host, "the rottenness behind the paint." It was clear to him that

"The pride evoked by the paint would turn to disillusionment and despair in the end, unless the rottenness itself was cured... The only body with the power to cure the rottenness, to compel the destruction of these slums... was the Government... And the only way to move governments is by political action."<sup>147</sup>

A Cockney on Main Street is uneven. There are longueurs; Hodge is at times stylistically on tiptoe; there are inconsistencies, some inclusions that a keener sense of modesty might have edited out - some preaching. But while there is a whiff here and there of self-projection as a 'character' (and note what the title implies about how both he and the book - like his two earlier hardbacks - were 'packaged') this is a mature, honest, fluent, accomplished, professional piece of work: an informed, sympathetic reaction to America from a socialist working-man's perspective.

### Herbert Hodge and the B B C

In It's Draughty in Front Hodge relates how while working at Unity in April, 1937, John Allen introduced him to Christopher Salmon of the B B C Talks Department, who was looking for some "working-class stories" - and for some "good English voices":

"Apparently he'd already tried <sup>some</sup> of the actors, but they weren't good on the microphone."<sup>148</sup>

Salmon arranged an audition.

### B B C Talks Department in the 1930s

The evolution of the BBC in what has been called "The Golden Age of Wireless" (Briggs, 1965) - and as part of that evolution of the Talks Department and more generally of the B B C's formulation of policy on handling contentious issues, on providing platforms for a wide spectrum of opinion and on giving access to the air waves to a socially and regionally broad range of speakers - all this is beginning to attract attention. The Talks Department and its responsibilities in the 1930s underwent a series of redefinitions, these constantly modifying its relationships with, for example, News and Education. The story is complicated and full of conflict and controversies of a kind that went to the very heart of the B B C's status and functions.

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Paddy Scannell (1980) analyses two series on unemployment, in 1933 and 1934 (the first partly based on first-hand accounts of visiting areas of acute unemployment; the second including eleven fifteen-minute talks by unemployed workers). Of the second series, 'Time to Spare' (produced by Felix Greene) Scannell recounts a story that

suggests just how radical a departure it was seen to be:

"Reith in fact ... was summoned to Number Ten and told by MacDonald that the series must stop. Reith replied that it was within the power of the government to order the BBC to discontinue the series but that if it did, he would, at that time in the schedule when the talks should be given, order the announcer to declare that the next 20 minutes would be silent because the government had refused to allow the unemployed to express their views. Faced with this threat MacDonald backed down and the series continued." 150

Scannell goes on:

"These two series should be seen as part of a wider effort by programme makers to find new ways of re-presenting politics, news and current social problems to the listening public ...." 151

He spells out the potential and actual effect of such ways of using radio. Contrasting the potential radio audience with the "small and self-selecting audiences" of such accounts as Orwell's in The Road to Wigan Pier ("received and distant images of the working classes as victims") Scannell writes:

"But the contexts in which (these two series)... operated gave the programmes an inescapable radical edge and a hard political thrust. There had not been heard before on radio such a spelling out of the facts of living on the dole or in a rat infested slum, in a way which broke through statistics and abstract debate to the realities of how people lived those conditions. Nor had working people been heard to tell of the conditions they endured and their feelings about them. Access to the microphone for such speakers was a significant extension of radio's social range. Radio addressed not the particular publics of the daily newspapers, not the specialised readership of the Left Book Club, not the tiny audiences for the documentary films, but the general public, society at large... Marshall's descriptions of the slums were greeted with frank disbelief by some listeners. 'Either you are the world's biggest liar, or you are trying to play the funny man', wrote one anonymous correspondent of his description of the East End slums." 152

Scannell, Briggs and Richard Lambert (1940) all describe the disintegration of the Talks Department in 1934-1935. Scannell writes of

"a systematic effort to weed out or nullify the activities of those programme makers whose work in one way or another was troublesome ... an elite of policy making high officials ...(beginning) to impose corporate definitions of BBC policy across the whole range of programme output...a closure on broadcasting, whereby the BBC sought to achieve one voice..." 153

Richard Lambert, editor of The Listener (1929-1939), describes in an extremely outspoken book written in 1940 after resigning from the BBC, 154  
a Golden Age of the Talks Department that began in 1929 and otherwise depicts a seesaw history: 'liberal' periods alternating with 'illiberal,' the waxing and waning of the old ideal of 'uplift'. He writes of:

"many diehard reactionaries...ready to find fault with the Talks Programme for 'cliquism' or 'left-wing tendencies'" 155

and of subtle forms of long-term and short-term censorship:

"The speaker finds himself very much at the mercy of the expert in broadcasting. He can be induced to make many modifications in his script, often of substance as well as form, in the name of 'broadcasting technique'". 156

Like Briggs, Lambert reports the appointment in February, 1936, of Sir Richard Roy Maconachie, who had served as British Minister at Kabul from 1930 to 1936, as Director of Talks. Lambert asserts that he set himself to return to the old ideal of 'uplift'; Briggs writes of "a retreat into caution":

"His appointment... was naturally seen as a 'swing to the right', but it was something more than this. Convinced of the significance of Talks and News inside the BBC's organization, he battled hard...in the interests of his department. He had a genuine interest in promoting the work of young men, and he soon won their confidence by allowing them both security and freedom...In the last two years of the peace there were few series of talks which compared in excitement with those of the earlier 1930s, and controversy itself began to seem somewhat vieux jeu. The most interesting reaction inside the BBC was technical rather than politi-

cal. Both from the 'left' and 'right' there was a demand for new techniques in the broadcasting of the spoken word. The approach of Hilda Matheson and Siepmann seemed to be out of date, particularly in its emphasis on the formal script and the single speaker. Could not the BBC learn from Mass Observation? Did it have to rely on an elite? Could not more use be made of speakers in the regions, speakers who would not naturally use the standard BBC English with which the Talk was associated?" <sup>157</sup>

#### Hodge and the BBC ('Channel 6')

The story of Hodge's association with the BBC is the climax of It's

#### Draughty in Front:

"...it was an atmosphere I could grow in. Those six months, from the beginning of October (1937) to the end of March, (1938) were, I think, the happiest of my life." <sup>158</sup>

There is perhaps reason to believe that that association (stretching over the best part of two decades) was also the climax of Hodge's working life. The story of Hodge's association with the BBC can be pieced together from passages in It's Draughty in Front and A Cockney on Main Street - but most interestingly from correspondence and other documents in the BBC Written Archive.

In what follows I first sketch in outline Hodge's association with the BBC ; then explore some aspects of that association: for example, matters of language and broadcasting style and technique; 'feedback' and the nature of the audience; the roles in which he was 'cast' by his employers - how he and his employers perceived one another; and the importance of his experiences for his 'career'.

#### Hodge and the BBC: outline

After not one but several auditions and trial recordings with



Christopher Salmon (of which more below) Hodge broadcast his first talk - on two books he liked (The Spacious Adventures of the Men in the Street by Eimar O'Duffy and Ipimblorigg by Laurence Houseman) in September, 1937. There followed some four years of frequent broadcasting: through the rest of 1937 and 1938 a series of talks on cab-driving (including one to Europe and one to the U S A); participation (as 'Cinemagoer') in a weekly cinema series -

"...twelve weekly discussions with full experts in which I questioned them from the cinemagoer's point of view" - 159

and in 'Men Talking' - fifteen minute spots described by Hodge as follows:

"Three of us met at Broadcasting House an hour or so before we were due to go on the air, and were introduced to each other over a sandwich and a drink. We knew beforehand the subject we were going to discuss - or, rather, talk about. The meal gave us just time to break the ice and get talking. Then we went into the studio, sat down around the mike and went on talking. As we talked, we were put on the air - we didn't know the exact moment - and at the end of twenty minutes we were faded out, still talking. We didn't get anywhere with our discussion, of course. The idea was simply to start the listeners, particularly those in discussion groups, talking too." 160

In 1939-1940 Hodge was cast as the eponymous Ordinary Reader in a series 'An Ordinary Reader Wants to Know'. Examples include none-too-cosy exchanges with the Hon Max Aitken, General Manager of The Sunday Express, 161

and with Eric Newton, 162 following the latter's series 'The Artist in

the Witness Box'. 163 Throughout these four very active years there was in addition to actual broadcasts much discussion and planning, face to face and by letter, that came to nothing: a notable example was a talk

suggested by a young producer, Guy Burgess, to be entitled 'The English

Middle Classes Make Me Wild'.

In A Cockney on Main Street the trajectory of Hodge's career around this time becomes clear:

"...owing to a persistent writer's itch and some extraordinary good luck (the banning of a play by the Lord Chamberlain) I began to make a little money out of writing. I continued to drive a cab when I felt like it, but I was no longer dependent on the gamble of the cab rank for a livelihood. I had become a member of the comfortable classes, living in a pleasant little village not too far from town, with a beautiful view from my window a nice new bathroom, a motor-car to make me independent of railway timetables, and, above all, the feeling that I was a person...The outbreak of war, and paper rationing, killed most of my journalism. But it greatly increased the radio work."

After 1941, Hodge's 'stock fell': his broadcasts became much rarer and the ratio of cabbage to broadcasting changed once again:

"Up to the end of the first blitz I was almost fully occupied with regular radio talks on the Home and the various English overseas services. Then my quarterly contracts were not renewed. I was, apparently, finished as a regular broadcaster. I've never discovered exactly why. All I know is how I felt about it." 165

The reasons, which I explore below, become clear as one reads the BBC files.

In August 1943 a proposal for Hodge to play the cab driver in C Gordon Glover's play 'Cab, Sir?' came to nothing; and over the next eleven years it became a question of a broadcast here and there - such as the following: "In our Garden", "On Bowdlerising", "Bernard Shaw is Ninety", "Reminiscences of a London Taxi Driver", "South Bank and Battersea" (Festival of Britain, 1951), "When I was a Lad" (1954).

#### Matters of Language and Broadcasting Style

In the earliest months of his association with the BBC, especially in his auditions, trial recordings and discussion with the admirable

Christopher Salmon, Hodge was brought to think as never before about questions of language: about the social and linguistic dimensions of standard and non-standard dialects and accents; about the nature of and relationships between speech and writing; about the challenge of combining in the (asymmetrical) communication pattern of (live) radio talks the 'naturalness', the relaxed easiness of colloquial spoken exchange with the order, coherence and deliberation of polished written text - all for a vast, scarcely imaginable audience listening with varying degrees of attention. The 'disembedding' <sup>166</sup> and 'foregrounding' of such issues is reflected in the space Hodge gave to them in his autobiography, in his correspondence with Christopher Salmon - and in an article - 'The Difficulties of the Uneducated Writer' - which he contributed to Life and Letters Today.

Christopher Salmon, operating in the climate Briggs has described -

"...a demand for new techniques in the broadcasting of the spoken word...use...of speakers in the regions, speakers who would not naturally use the standard BBC English with which the Talk was associated" - <sup>167</sup>

seemed to Hodge to be more interested in him than in his writings. First

Hodge tried one of his stories (first-person Cockney chauffeur):

"My voice, he said, was splendid, **but my story...**" <sup>168</sup>

Next he tried some of his 'philosophy' material; but neither Salmon nor the Talks Department - nor in their estimation the world - was ready for it. Finally, once the favourite-books talk was agreed on, it dawned on Hodge that he must write not an essay but a talk:

"I saw I'd got to tackle the job like writing a play. The only

difference was that my principal character was myself. All I had to do was to find out what kind of a character I was, and write for him... I spent most of my time... walking up and down my room, and listening to myself talk... Then I ...rewrote (the essay) in talk - just as I'd talk on the cab-rank, except that I put in all the bright things I usually thought of afterwards." 169

These preoccupations, as indicated above, dominated his early correspondence with Christopher Salmon. He was trying to be

"Unliterary without being illiterate - using my natural Cockney idiom." 170

He found himself occupied by the problem of being technically good as well as being one of the "genuine people in the street". In March 1930, following the cinema talks produced by Norman Luker he wrote to Salmon with the suggestion (in a sense anticipating a now pervasive use of the tape-recorder) of a chat in the presence of a shorthand writer, then using the resultant draft in producing a final version:

"Luker found the method very successful in the cinema talks. Both Hitchcock's and Massey's talks were done in this way, without a word of paper preparation. It's more trouble, but with a man unused to writing talk you get a much more spontaneous effect." 171

Hodge showed a sure theoretical sense of what a good broadcast talk required - and acquired it quicker than many lecturers too-far-steeped in written communication:

"One can...overdo the preparation. The more one prepares, the closer one tends to pack the thought. And I think there are rigid limits to the number of ideas that can be conveyed over the air in a given time...The most one can do, I think, is to start people thinking; to suggest a train of thought. It's fatal for a broadcaster to try and walk a mental tight-rope...He's competing against too many counter-attractions in the listener's home. As soon as listening becomes a conscious effort, it's all over with that particular talk so far as the majority of listeners are concerned...The talk written purely for sound hardly makes sense in print...It may be possible to write something that is both a lively talk and a readable essay, but I doubt it." 172

More importantly, Hodge's shrewd grasp of the essentials of his sort of sound broadcasting is evident in what remains of the work itself - and can be confidently inferred from the work the BBC continued to put his way.

It is perhaps appropriate here before leaving questions of language to make reference to Hodge's article, which was much preoccupied with language problems.

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'The Difficulties of the Uneducated Writer,' (Channel 5) is a remarkable essay for Hodge to have written in 1939. It is a perceptive piece of sociolinguistic analysis, showing awareness of aspects of language that remains today far from commonplace; it is also an impressive articulation of some of the problems and issues - for example, class asymmetries in the incidence of writing and publishing - inscribed in the present study. Apart from examining some of the speech-writing-broadcasting material offered elsewhere and discussed above - and in passing making a respectable attempt at describing the reading process (offering the account that remained orthodox among educators until challenged by the work of psycholinguists in the past two decades) - Hodge does three main things. Firstly, he explores the patterns of dominance and subordination of, and unequal esteem as between, standard and non standard dialect in writing and print. Secondly, he articulates how this undermines the confidence of non standard speakers to become writers. Thirdly, he asserts the importance of transfusing "English prose" with speech-based non standard language.

The following quotations convey the essence:

"...There's no doubt writing does come easier (to the educated writer). Even at the worst, he's setting out to express himself in a natural way. We're not. We're usually trying

to put our thoughts into a foreign language. Our native language is the language of the workshop and the street - a talk-language. If we put it on paper, it doesn't look right. It doesn't, somehow, read right. As a matter of fact, few of us would even begin to write it. We're not absolutely uneducated. We're what is perhaps worse: semi-educated. We know before we start that our native language won't look right in print. So when we pick up a pen we try to translate our thoughts from their natural phrasing into what we feel to be literary English. And that, I think, is where we go wrong. We've got to learn to write, of course. We've got to master "as" and "like" and "would" and "should", and all the rest of the grammatical works. We've got to be literate. But we're most of us apt to confuse being literate with being literary. And when we do that we're in danger of stifling our native idiom...It's so easy for the uneducated writer to fall into literary gentility. Everything combines to push him into it. There's the consciousness of his own ignorance, which inclines him to swallow everything the textbooks tell him...The only thing wrong with our sounds is that they haven't yet got a literary form. It's our job to make one." <sup>174</sup>

And

"I was a little ashamed of admitting I was trying to write at all. We're conservative in the working-class. It isn't so long, historically speaking, since we learned to read. Writing is still a bit of a mystery - something real men don't do. It's best to keep it dark until you're printed - and better, perhaps, to go on keeping it dark even after that...We're so ignorant, and so conscious of our ignorance, that almost anyone with M A after his name can do what he likes with us...the difficulty of getting his work published...saps his self-confidence and inclines him to imitate the style of the genuine literary gent...." <sup>175</sup>

And

"Let's set it down on paper just as we talk it and, so long as the grammar's all right, ignore the literary textbooks for once... (There's) no reason why we uneducated writers should stifle our own talk sounds, and use these others...Literary English...needs constant renewal, a constant flow of fresh sap along the veins of the parent plant. And the uneducated writer is peculiarly fitted to supply the sap. He's working deep down at the roots, among the talk-stuff. It's his job to take hold of his native idiom, and to wrestle with it until he's found a way of making it convey his meanings accurately on paper. Instead of turning out pages of polished prose...he'll be writing a few paragraphs of living language - paragraphs that stand up and talk." <sup>176</sup>

(Hodge's article drew a riposte - 'The Difficulties of the Educated Writer' - from Trevor James in the following issue of Life and Letters Today.)  
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Hodge, in sometimes naive terms, sought to theorise and generalise his problems as a writer. He did not in this short article, push his analysis a final stage to show the socio-political-historical determinants of the situation he described: the appropriation of writing (and print) by one dialect and one class - and its 'naturalisation' - to the exclusion of others. But the essay remains as impressive by an attempt by a working-class writer to theorise these difficult social-linguistic problems as any I am aware of.

#### 'Feedback' and the nature of audience

One of the threads in both this consideration of the experiences of Herbert Hodge and the study as a whole is coming to see participation in the process of writing and 'publishing' experience as **constituting informal self-education**; another is the nature of 'audiences' addressed and, to a lesser degree, the 'feedback' forthcoming. Just how educative was the experience described in the previous section - Hodge wrote of "an atmosphere I could grow in" - scarcely needs stressing: **meta-awareness** of the nature of language, of the relationship of language to thinking and to society opens up critical perspectives on experience and the most perplexing questions of the nature and determinants of reality. As regards audience Hodge had now reached the farthest end of the continuum: a vast, heterogeneous, unknown and unknowable **listenership**. Whether in proportion to that vastness, or whether people were keener to offer

feedback to broadcasters (perhaps they seem, in their use of speech rather than writing, more palpably present and approachable) than to more remote and more apparently absent writers, the 'feedback' to Hodge's broadcasts seems to have greatly exceeded that to any of his other work.

Some came from neighbours, via Margaret Hodge:

"the small children in the flat downstairs went looking into the passage and behind the door for me, refusing to believe my voice was coming from the wireless-set " 178

"He don't bother to listen to talks as a rule. People only come and jabber. But it was just as if he was sitting in the room talking to us..."

Some from cab-driver colleagues:

"The subtlest compliment of all comes from taxi-driver critics who feel I have 'sold my soul to the BBC! and let the cab-trade down, by just letting myself talk anyhow' instead of reading 'proper speech'" 179

but most from strangers:

"People wrote to me saying how 'natural' I sounded - 'just as if you were working at the bench beside me.' I gorged myself on those letters." 180

A memo on audience reaction to the cinema series noted:

"Many listeners wrote thanking him for championing their cause (as 'ordinary cinemagoers') and suggesting questions they'd like him to put to the experts. Some people objected to his cockney accent and others to his bad manners in referring to speakers without the prefix Mr." 181

One may hazard the guess that this 'feedback', along with the sense of importance derived from being one addressing millions, and the fees (five to seven guineas for a talk in the late 1930s, double that a decade later), was part of the intense attraction of broadcasting for Hodge:



"I felt my street-corner speaking, my wrestling with words on paper, and my plays, had all been so much preparation for these supreme moments at the microphone....Now...I had the perfect medium of expression. I could take as long as I needed to compose what I had to say, then I could come to the microphone and say it... broadcasting was my perfect medium." 182

And to Christopher Salmon:

"I yearn for that mike as a musician for his harp." 183

#### Hodge's role with the B B C

These testimonies to Hodge's euphoria in the early months take on poignancy as one plots the graph<sup>-curve</sup> of his involvement with the B B C falling away after 1941. It is important to try and account for the decline in his fortunes, in this respect.

It is clear that his professionalism was not in doubt: evidence of his general professional competence as a writer will be discussed in the following section; his competence as a broadcaster is evident from the surviving work, from the frequency with which he was hired to broadcast and the range of content and radio forms he mastered - and from testimonies dotted through the files. One memo reads:

"We should send a first-rate broadcaster to a factory for a fortnight, attend Joint Consultation meetings, broadcast his impressions in same human terms The New Yorker uses for its Profiles. Hodge occurs to me." 184

Again,

"Here, one felt, was a man of the people who could talk to the people. While he will never say or write anything very remarkable, he's the sort of person the public likes to have around. In the studio he works like a craftsman and knows how to bring to bear natural acting ability so as to make his script come alive...every American's opinion of the person he'd meet if he opened the door of an English pub." 185

In pursuing the decline in his fortunes with the BBC it should be said at the outset that there must have been then, as now, plenty of

competent, even talented people wanting to be broadcasters. Furthermore, there is no good reason why any broadcaster should necessarily be hired again and again. In fact, it seems that, with very few exceptions, the audience tends to grow weary of over-exposed 'personalities': that broadcasting media 'devour' people as fast as they do material. In the case of Hodge, however, there appear to have been in play other factors, whose analysis helps confirm impressions gathered elsewhere about the place and roles of working-class writers both in the "second moment" and at other conjunctures, including the present.

It is clear - and something encapsulated in Hodge's experience - that in the 1930s and early years of World War II there was an upsurge of interest in working-class experience and, especially, working class testimonies: on the part of socialists, of the general middle-class reading public (an interest with an anthropological dimension) and, judging from the above discussion of Hodge's involvement with the BBC, on the part of the broadcasting audience. As regards the interest of the BBC at around the time Hodge's involvement began, it is worth recalling the remarks of Asa Bridge quoted above:

"In the last two years of the peace...controversy itself began to seem somewhat vieux jeu ...Could not more use be made of speakers in the regions, speakers who would not naturally use the standard BBC English with which the Talk was associated?"

The first point is borne out by Hodge:

"My own talks were mainly on so-called 'uncontroversial' subjects."

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The second suggests the importance of sound-variety - specifically

of a non-standard voice now and again - to the making of entertaining radio. In short, Hodge, E L Coombes and a few other intelligent working-class voices were just what was needed and were duly hired. But their use was strictly limited. Not surprisingly, it was in no sense at all indicative of a radical shift from the domination of broadcasting by the middle-class, just as in the both different and fundamentally similar climate of today the presence of a few working-class voices herald no such thing. The word that comes to mind - and it seems appropriate so long as divested of any sense of 'conspiracy' - is 'tokenism'.

Such an analysis requires supporting evidence; the archive files relating to Hodge's work supply it - most fascinatingly in respect of how some BBC figures saw his role, and how Hodge, remarkably quick to see what was required, accepted it.

The key word in respect of Hodge's BBC role seems to have been 'representative'. He was to be first a representative cab-driver; then an Ordinary Reader, an Average Cinemagoer: a man in the street. John Pringle wrote to him about the interview with the Hon Max Aitken in the following terms:

"Your role will be that of the ordinary non-journalist newspaper reader, who has some questions he wants to ask about today's popular press." 187

Hodge had reassured Christopher Salmon a few months earlier that he was occupied by the problem of being technically good as well as one of the genuine "people in the street".

In his work for the BBC Hodge was cast as representative of the working-class, on and off the air. As regards the latter the files show

him diligently searching for other working-class potential broadcasters and for authentic working-class stories. He visits and mentions the extraordinary George Thomas, paralysed author of A Tenement in Soho, much admired by Harold Nicholson and Victoria Sackville-West; later he mentions the work of Ludwig Bemelmans and Frank Tilsley. In 1940 he writes with apparent exasperation to Norman Luker:

"I can't find these working-class broadcasters...The trouble with most of them, I think, is that they're so far Left they feel it's lowering their blasted dignity to be mixed up with the BBC." 188

Writing to Christopher Salmon he explains, perceptively, working-class attitudes to public libraries and the books within them:

"... they use the newsroom when they are out of work. But because the library is a borough council institution and 'official', they imagine the library books are also 'official', full of uplift, and education, and therefore 'dry'." 189

There are however hints that Hodge was not content with the position of working-class experience and of the working-class vis-a-vis broadcasting: i.e. as consumers; now and again as objects of interest of a certain sort; very occasionally as 'actors'; never as producers in the fullest sense:

"Have you ever considered a series treating working-class life as natural instead of quaint? A working-class commentary, as it were. 'Our street, week by week', sort of thing." 190

A memo filed by James Ferguson on 18 December 1940 makes things very explicit:

"I have impressed on him that I want him to speak of the audience's reactions to it rather more than his own, and I think his idea is to induce some of his pals in the cab shelter to see it and get their impressions."

Revealing are the following remarks early in 1941:

"In a letter written to me on January 16th by Murray - General

Manager of the C B C - he says:- 'I think you are overdoing our taxi-driver, Hodge. A fair amount of that goes a long way!' I don't think that Hodge carries a great deal of conviction as a representative of the proletariat. No doubt you will discuss this with Collins and Macalpine."

To this James Ferguson added the note:

"Hodge is 'being given a rest' as from the beginning of the new schedule." 191

A final pregnant sentence, from a memo at around the same time, is perhaps most revealing of all:

"In the world of broadcasting Hodge, even if a genuine taxi-driver, has partly ceased to have significance as such and has become the character, Herbert Hodge."

In the different climate of today - of pervasive personalisation and the 'cult of personality' in broadcasting - this might well have amounted to the thumbs up for Hodge. As it was it was the thumbs down.

#### BBC work and Hodge's career

There are perhaps three points to make. First, it is clear - for example from the section on language above, that Hodge made great gains, intellectually and artistically, from his experience in working with the BBC. His debt to the able and sympathetic people with whom he worked - the kindness of such as Christopher Salmon and Norman Luker is as evident as the critical intelligence they exercised on Hodge's behalf - is as clear from the correspondence as from Hodge's warm remarks in It's Draughty in Front. The growth of his confidence is palpable - for example in the modes of address he adopted (modes learned, presumably, from interlocutors such as the above, and which are, probably, rare among adult working-class people): in his broadcasting ("Well, Newton, as I said earlier on, these talks have opened my eyes to a great deal I hadn't been able to see for myself..."); and in the correspondence ("Dear

Luker"). Second, Hodge's BBC work meant he became widely known and acquired a 'shop window' for his talents. This led to invitations to lecture around the country, to involvement in events like a coroner's inquest on the death of the novel in St Pancras Town Hall in 1948, and to a considerable amount of journalism:

"...these talks opened a door into yet another new world. When they ended, I was asked to write a series of articles for a film paper, and as a result found myself meandering all agape through the synthetic world of the film studios." 192

Work for Life and Letters Today, John Bull and Titbits are further examples. Also, Hodge mentions in 1937 being approached by Harrap for an autobiography - so it seems likely that the idea and publication of It's Draughty in Front arose from his becoming known through broadcasting. Third, the earnings he achieved, especially during the golden three or four years, appear to have brought change of life style to some extent, even though he never stopped driving and, in fact, was back in the cab in 1945 after his bus work during the war. Although, as mentioned above, he and Margaret moved out to a bungalow at High Wycombe in 1939 and for a while ran a car they remained shrewdly aware that any prosperity they enjoyed was likely to be temporary and precarious:

"The bungalow is very well - and so are we, And the fact that we don't know how long this sort of thing is going to last gives every minute its special savour." 193

Herbert Hodge was seriously ill in 1952, losing for a while the use of his right arm and leg and suffering acutely from migraine. He was back at work driving in 1953 and moved to St Leonards on Sea in 1954. He died there on 9th August, 1962.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion a number of points emerge - about Herbert Hodge, his writing and the water in which working-class writers swam or floated or sank in his time.

Hodge emerges as a buoyant, energetic, optimistic man and, judged against such criteria as sales, continuing (if dwindling) publication and widespread esteem, a successful writer.<sup>194</sup> His range - including different kinds of journalism, plays, autobiography, 'travelogue' and varieties of broadcasting - and his development as a writer - from early C I N work in which he sadly misjudged his readership, to assured and accomplished later work (for example, his pieces of journalism for Titbits ('The World I should like after the War', 28 January, 1944) and John Bull (May day 1948) - are both impressive). However, most persistent writers show development of some sort: usually, but not always, change for the better. What distinguishes Hodge in this respect - because of his curtailed formal education and because he was a working-class writer - was that for him the activity of writing and the experiences contingent upon it were his chief means of growth. This assertion, of course, raises questions about the meaning of 'working-class writer' and about writing as a 'means of growth' - questions that, because they are fundamental to the climactic discussion of this study (developments post 1971), I shall treat only briefly here.

Hodge aspired to be, and became, a writer: he wrote a good deal over twenty years and gained access to a variety of different 'channels' of published communication. But he never stopped being a driver and for most of the time this was his basic livelihood. That alone, together with his upbringing, would, arguably, classify him as a 'working-class

writer', though in a relatively inert sense. (However, it is important not to discount the shaping role of a working-class or any other up-bringing, life-style and occupation in forming consciousness). A stronger classification depends on the writing itself being in some sense recognisably 'of the working-class'. Again, this is vague and problematic. It cannot mean merely writing about the working-class, for there is plenty of such writing by middle-class writers. It cannot mean socialist writing, for the same reason. The term seems to me to apply to Hodge's writing in that consistently his themes are working-class experience and democratic, gradualist socialism (conceived as pre-eminently in the interests of working-class people), while his concerns are informing middle-class 'outsiders' about the working-class, on the one hand (implicitly correcting stereotypes of working-class 'mindlessness' and philistinism), and on the other fervently promoting the education of working-class people (especially their self-education through library use, writing and dialogue with colleagues). Of the latter his work for E I N is the clearest example; and, within it, his misjudgement of the readership (referred to above) can be seen as the sincerest of compliments.

Writing as a 'means of growth' has been much discussed and will be argued for later in the study. That writing was just this in Hodge's case emerges first, in the development I have explored (though it is of course impossible to disentangle writing in this case from other inextricably-related processes and experiences - contact with John Allen and others at Unity Theatre, involvement in productions, collaborative authorship (Busmen) and play selection, no doubt learning from editors



at Michael Joseph, certainly and very importantly, from Christopher Salmon, Norman Luker and others at the BBC); second, in the palpable intellectual excitement evident in, for example, his accounts of working with Unity and the BBC (especially 'between the lines' of his correspondence) and his energetic grappling with questions of language and social class in the Life and Letters Today essay; third, in his extensive reading,<sup>195</sup> evidence of which is everywhere in his work and correspondence. About his earliest attempts at writing Hodge had written<sup>196</sup> of his lack of confidence and that of his class:

"It is difficult for a manual worker to achieve the self-confidence necessary for writing... If only I could get into print, I thought, I'd have a little more confidence."

Unbidden, and as has been seen, he testifies to the growth of just such necessary confidence; from a few lines of the final chapter of his autobiography we can infer something of both its means and directions of growth:

"As for the future, I expect I shall go on driving my cab, and learning to write and talk... The most important thing about the present - for me - is that I'm just beginning to feel grown up. I seem to have taken a long time about it, but I was always slow. It may be an illusion even now. But as it's the first time I've had the feeling, I'm inclined to think it's true. I feel integrated; complete. I know what I'm up to."

If it is rare to discover accounts of past working-class writers struggling to 'find a voice' it is rare also to find in a single working-class writer's experience just about the whole gamut of writerly activity possible at a given time. Hodge was successful, but his modest revealed talent and the climate of the time meant that his success - and more important his involvement - was relatively short-lived. With regard to his book-publishing two constraints operated.

First, as regards his three 'mainstream-published' hardbacks for Michael Joseph, the criteria were, presumably, commercial. The publication risk, certainly in respect of the first two, seems to have been justified. But it is hard to see where Hodge might have 'gone' next - and shown a profit. Trevor James, writing in 1939, put this problem thus:

"In the last year or so we have had from the unacademically-produced writers lives of an ex-burglar, a waiter, a soldier, a taxi-driver, a domestic servant, a tramp; lives of miners galore, and, in Seven Shifts, the lives of seven men in seven different occupations. Some of these were well-written, most less so, and several were simply written-up to catch the **prevailing fashion**. Having drawn upon their experience, what will these writers do when it is their imagination they have to draw upon?...the novelty will wear off... and a man can only write his life once."

The experience of contributing a number to the paperback Fact project highlights the second **constraint**. This was writing with a socialist purpose and Hodge was called as a witness: to provide a document, a brick in the wall of the Left case. Although Fact did publish a great deal of other, non-testamentary material - 'facts' on economic, political and social issues gathered and analysed, argument, stories and poems - much of this was by people now famous and little, it seems, by people descriptably working-class in the sense sketched above. The control of publishing in, and the theoretical impetus of, such Left projects, tended, not surprisingly - in spite of their numerical paucity - to rest with expensively-educated, middle-class socialists.

None of this is, of course, surprising: neither that commercial publishers applied commercial criteria, nor that Left written discourse was such that working-class people would find it hard to participate. It is worth mentioning only because it underlines two features of the

time and in addition prepares the ground for a contrast with the situation post-1971. First, working-class writers in the 'second moment' gained access to publication only on the terms of another class and culture (and here Hodge's experience with the B B C is the most vivid example). Second, that while the publication (often by Left publishers) of a number of working-class novels in the 1930s (often revealing the 'imagination' Trevor James refers to above) shows that book publishing was relatively 'open' (in a class sense), the differential access to education and conditions propitious for writer apprenticeship meant that it was unlikely that working-class people would (a) write at all and (b) get published if they did write.

Hodge's experience evokes both comparisons and contrasts with the current situation; to develop the significant and important differences in respect of print publishing, now as compared with then, will be the task of later chapters. As regards broadcasting (peripheral to this study) the position seems qualitatively unchanged.

Finally, the special importance of Hodge's experience of his involvement with Cab Trade News draws attention to an important, and to 'outsiders' somewhat obscure and neglected arena of working-class writing and publication. It beckons the student of working-class writing and as more becomes known may well demand radical reconceptualisation: the drawing of new maps. Certainly, any reasonably comprehensive account of working-class writing and publishing will require some attention to the journals - not merely union journals - generated by working-class people in their associations.

Four

B L COOMBES

Miner

1893-1974

"Well I thought - as I've thought ever since - that there was urgent need for the country and world to know more about mining life. They didn't because it was strange to them, they didn't understand how miners lived. That's why I wrote about it."

Interview with Mike Rosen

"...the most effective writing about mining life in South Wales is in the autobiographical work of B L Coombes..."

1

Raymond Williams

### Introduction

On 14 June, 1974, the Neath Guardian ran the headline 'Miner who became author dies aged 81' across its front page; two days earlier The Times had published an obituary. The local recognition, while relatively unremarkable, accords a special place to, and takes an unmistakable local pride in,

a man who had in a lifetime of prodigious activity - which included writing for thirty years a weekly column in the Neath Guardian itself- done more than anyone else to convey what being a miner in South Wales meant (an aim he had breathily and movingly explained, his "chest bad from the dust",

2

not long before in the interview quoted above ). The implied national recognition of his 'importance' places Coombes with a mere handful of working-class writers (in the sense sketched earlier in the study) who are fairly widely known. With regard to his wider importance John Lehmann has written:

"I was one of many who had their imagination awoken and their heart stirred by the vivid human appeal of these stories, their sensitive, unhysterical truth with a just perceptible under-current of stolid bitterness; and as a story or a poem is like a pebble dropped in a pond, its effect spreading out from those - perhaps a small circle but influential in forming opinion - who are interested to read it, to hundreds of thousands who may never read it, so I believe that B L Coombes' writing about the lives

of the miners may have had much to do with the great stirring of national conscience which eventually made the nationalisation of the mines a priority no party could withstand. <sup>3</sup>

A study of the work and experience of B L Coombes, as was the case with Herbert Hodge, is suggestive of what it meant during his time, and perhaps has always meant and still means, to be <sup>a</sup> working-class writer: in matters of style, form, craft, writer 'apprenticeship' and self-education; of altered relationships: with family, friends, fellow workers, 'literary people', readers (actual and notional) and so on. Again, his experience confirms and points up tendencies already considered above in respect of the conditions of working-class writing and publication prevailing in the 'second moment'. A discussion of that experience enriches and adds to the emerging portrayal. In one particular - the extent to which Coombes was constrained by the special set of conditions attaching to what I have characterised as writing "within Left projects conceived as part of programmes of political action and dominated at the levels of production and consumption by the middle-class Left" <sup>4</sup> his experience illuminates a key arena of working-class writing and publication whose proper consideration has been deliberately postponed until now because it appears to have been central, important and determining for B L Coombes as it was not for Herbert Hodge.

B L Coombes has received considerable attention - relative, that is, both to the marked neglect of Herbert Hodge and to that general neglect of all working-class writers that becomes evident from asking around among the generally well-read and well-informed. Therefore in what follows I concentrate on exploring two closely-related issues: the

extent to which a study of Coombes's work and experience suggests what it is to be a working-class writer; and what such a study confirms, illuminates, qualifies, adds to an 'anatomy' of the 'second moment'.

So as to explore these questions, in what follows I

- 1 Sketch an outline biography;
- 2 Attempt a brief critical study of Coombes's work (setting it, where appropriate, into biographical context);
- 3 Attempt to draw together (a) what emerges about the 'second moment' and (b) what informs, and can be carried forward into, the major tasks and themes of the study.

5

#### Biography

B L Coombes was born (9 January, 1893) in Wolverhampton, the son of a then grocer. The family soon moved to Herefordshire to rent a small-holding, on which the boy worked from 14 years on. In those years, like Jude Fawley gazing out over the countryside towards Christminster,<sup>6</sup> Coombes

"was fascinated by that light in the sky. Night after night I watched it reddening the shadows beyond the Brecknock Beacons, sometimes fading until it only showed faintly, then brightening until it seemed that all the country was ablaze... Sometimes I felt sure that I could see these flames and feel their warmth, but it could only have been fancy, for they were more than sixty miles away from us."<sup>7</sup>

The lights emanated from the Dowlais 'Bessemer Works', Merthyr Tydfil. At the age of eighteen, both 'pulled' by better wages and prospects and 'pushed' by the "hopelessness at home", Coombes migrated west.

He started as a miner's helper at the Resolven pit (near Neath):

"the beginning of a full working life of forty-two years spent underground." <sup>8</sup>

In 1913 he married Mary Rogers, whose father was checkweigher at the Resolven pit and secretary of the local union lodge.

At some time in the early 1930s, in his late thirties, when there were far more miners unemployed than there are miners altogether in the second half of the 1980s and when

"There were no great fires brightening the summer sky  
...They belonged to the prosperous days that were gone " <sup>9</sup>

Coombes began to realize

"how little was known of the price of coal - not in terms of pounds, shillings and pence, but human misery and suffering " <sup>10</sup>

"that no true explanation of the miners' conditions reached the outer world because none of his class was skilled in the use of the written word. He decided to attempt the task himself." <sup>11</sup>

He bought an old typewriter and

"gave all his time to a study of writing and hoped to cultivate a style which could be recognised as being good even amongst the most expert critics." <sup>12</sup>

In the next seven or so years Coombes, determined to "learn the tricks", <sup>13</sup> worked at his project - but

"No one...wanted his articles and short stories. A big old sea chest grew full to the brim with his manuscripts and rejection slips." <sup>14</sup>

The breakthrough finally came in 1938 when he had two stories <sup>15</sup> accepted within one week and "was awarded a silver medal for an original story at a Borough of Leyton Eisteddfod". <sup>16</sup> Perhaps more important to him even than this was contact with John Lehmann, poet, writer and editor. Lehmann had received and praised Coombes's story



'The Flame' in 1936, was prepared to publish it and others, was quick to spot his unique combination of experience as a miner and quality as a writer and suggested he write an autobiography. Lehmann was later to recall B L Coombes as

"This small, hard-bitten miner, with his small, square head, his pale, rough-hewn, serious face..." <sup>18</sup>

Coombes sent his eighty-thousand word autobiography These Poor Hands to Victor Gollancz, who promptly accepted it, adding:

"I think your book will stir the public conscience more than any book of recent years..." <sup>19</sup>

These Poor Hands was published by the Left Book Club ("without one word

<sup>20</sup> being altered") in 1939, sold sixty thousand copies in three months, was selected as Book of the Month by Professor Laski and L A G Strong, was favourably reviewed by J B Priestley and Cyril Connolly - and by John Strachey:

"In the sense of experience Mr Coombes is an average miner, but not in other ways. Not only amongst workers, but amongst human beings in general it is but an infinitesimal percentage who have the literary gift that he enjoys. This man can write. He has here produced a book which hardly anyone could read without feeling great pleasure and without experiencing great emotion." <sup>21</sup>

These Poor Hands was

"discussed at over a thousand group meetings and miners' leaders used it at national rallies. Unemployed groups collected their pennies to buy it and a group of Labour M Ps sent a joint letter of appreciation." <sup>22</sup>

It is central to Coombes's work - and what he is best known for.

In the same year, and in the edition following Hodge's 'I drive a taxi', Fact <sup>23</sup> carried Coombes's seventy-page monograph 'I am a Miner'.

In the pattern beginning to emerge - solitary application-rejection-a strikingly successful autobiography-adoption by (and perhaps incorporation in) Left projects - as well as in the detail of his subsequent career as a writer, there are, clearly, marked resemblances to the experience of Herbert Hodge. To plot these, as below, is arguably to sketch-map the world of many working-class writers in the 'second' moment'.

There were to be two further books, both about the world of mining and of miners, their families and friends: Those Clouded Hills (1944)<sup>24</sup> and Miner's Day (1945).<sup>25</sup> But if, as is all too often the case - and for reasons bound up with the special place of books among the variety of published material in our culture - the account ended there much of the greatest importance to understanding Coombes's achievement and its context would be missed.

On 23 June 1939 the Neath Guardian had carried an enthusiastic review of These Poor Hands:

"...to those who know little of life underground...the book will be a revelation, and even those whose bread and butter it is to mine the black diamonds will find plenty to hold their attention."

In the following year (22 November, 1940) Coombes started contributing a weekly column to that same local newspaper. This continued almost without break (initially a thousand words, latterly five hundred) until he was forced by ill-health to give up in 1972. In addition, and especially in the 1940s, he contributed articles and stories to Left Review, Picture Post, New Statesman and Nation, The Fortnightly Review, Coal,

New Writing, Penguin New Writing, Folios of New Writing, Argosy, British Ally, Geographical Magazine, Reader's Digest. By May, 1946, "when

Coombes was elected to membership of the Society of Authors, he had

26  
already written over four hundred articles."

His writing brought him critical esteem - in reviews and marked by  
27  
both literary prizes and the award of a pension by the Royal Literary

Fund. As with Herbert Hodge, it fell to his twenty two broadcasts (in  
28  
features and talks) to bring him a 'mass audience'. Coombes "wrote the  
scripts of several documentary films and assisted Jack Lindsay with his  
play 'Face of Coal' which was produced at the Scale Theatre in 1946".<sup>29</sup>

30  
He also undertook "a deal of Listener Research for the B B C".

Amid this welter of writerly activity Coombes remained a miner until  
a roof-fall finally ended his career underground. He was a miners' lodge  
committeeman -

"requests (from colleagues for help) come at about ten  
each day...We meet at least once a week, for a period  
of four hours and are busy...Our meetings are run on pro-  
per lines. Full minutes are recorded, reports from  
deputations and conferences are given, and finally,  
colliery cases are brought forward, sifted, and decided.  
We pick deputations to meet the management every week,  
when problems of pay, custom and new working conditions  
are discussed. Frequently we hold general meetings to  
report to the rest of the men and we are elected annually,  
here about one to a hundred men...Until a man actually takes  
part in this section of Trade Union work he cannot imagine  
how many and how varied are the problems..."<sup>31</sup>

In addition Coombes was founder member and later secretary to the St

John's Ambulance Brigade (compare John Langley, 1976, 18), founder member

of the cricket club (during the General Strike), secretary, playing member

and assistant conductor of the orchestra and member of the dramatic committee - all at Resolven - and member of the management committee of the Miners' Rest Home at Porthcawl.

32

Perhaps most astounding of all, Coombes also found time to be a part-time farmer. Everywhere his work proclaims his origins and interest in farming. Around the time of the publication of These Poor Hands Coombes moved out of his miner's cottage and rented a ~~derelict~~ hill-farm at Glyneath. Five years later, enabled by his earnings from writing, he bought Nantfyedwen, "a farm of 160 acres, in Onllwyn in the Vale of Neath, which had formerly been a public house and chapel." 33

"At this time Bert Coombes...was working nights regularly. Often he would leave for work on a Sunday and not return until Tuesday - the lack of sleep didn't seem to affect him./A few hours on the couch and he was ready to join his wife Mary in the fields. Cutting hay, pitching, tending to their herd of cows, feeding a small army of chickens. There was always plenty to do.../After a bite to eat, and perhaps forty winks by the fire if he was lucky, Bert was ready for the night shift again." 34

In January, 1974, B L Coombes was admitted to the Adelina Patti Hospital, Craig-y-Nos. He died there on 4 June 1974.

In this section I attempt a brief critical study of the work of B L Coombes. This will serve as the basis of the following discussion: the crux of this chapter. As a principle of organization (only) I call on the crude categorical distinction between 'matter' (roughly, the 'what' of writing) and 'manner' (the 'how').

### Matter

B L Coombes's central focus is on the work underground and the life above-ground of miners and mining communities - and on the extent to which the one shapes and determines the other. His major themes are: the nature (including the changing nature) of underground work; pay and conditions; injustice to miners; their knowledge, skills and attitudes; the mining industry; the nature and importance of trade union activity; the life-styles and living standards of pit villages: homes, transport, amenities etc; inevitably and prominently, his own biography, values, attitudes, beliefs and life-style. Minor themes include: the despoliation of pit areas; pitmen as partly self-sufficient part-time 'smallholders'; the obscenity of World War II. (In his Neath Guardian articles he was 'licensed' to range freely beyond the foregoing (although that continues to form the 'common core'). Accordingly, because it is exceptional, I postpone a consideration of this aspect of his work for separate treatment at the end of the section.)

### Underground

"Work is the crux of the matter. It extends its influence

over all other aspects of the society's life and what has seemed separate from it is shown to be a futile illusion when the Depression reveals it as a foundation of everything." <sup>35</sup>

Everywhere in his work Coombes tells of the appalling conditions of the 'underground man', especially the face-worker: the dangers (immediate and long-term) from explosions, fire <sup>36</sup>, water, dust (in South Wales particularly <sup>37</sup>) and the roof-falls that killed two of his closest colleagues, Hutch and Griff, <sup>38</sup> of which incidents the facts of responsibility had often to be suppressed by the victims' colleagues lest their jobs and the widows' compensation be jeopardised.

Coombes grew suspicious of the notion of progress - at least with regard to work underground. New working practices, part of the 'speed-up' much discussed by 1930s working-class writers, seemed in his view to increase the dangers and, on balance, worsen conditions. He had been, in 1914,

"...one of the first men in the South Wales field to use the new mechanical coal-cutters and in his later working life...(was) a specialist in this means of getting coal." <sup>39</sup>

He writes of this with some pride and gives full recognition to the production advantages of mechanical coal-getting:

"What a collier could do by working hard all day, this <sup>40</sup> machine would accomplish in two minutes."

However, he is emphatic about the disadvantages - as is a miner reported by Ferdinand Zweig (1948):

"...mechanization brought specialisation and greater monotony, and has replaced the overall skill of the miner as such by the inferior, or rather one-sided, skill of the machine-miner. The old-time collier used to do everything - ripping and packing, putting up props, cutting and filling the coal - now

he is only shovelling coal on to the belt...The work is still heavy, dirty and dangerous. It is true that the machines have made the work easier, but they have brought other discomforts. Men with pneumatic picks complain about the constant shaking and vibrations, which get on their nerves. Men on machine cutting, especially where it is done without water infusion, complain about more dust. And all say that the places where the machine work is done are more dangerous because the noise prevents them from hearing the cracking of the roofs, the latter being affected by the violent vibrations." <sup>41</sup>

Coombes dwells especially on the de-skilling of the miner, the decline

<sup>42</sup>

of older craft-values. This crystallizes in an anecdote he tells

<sup>43</sup>

again and again and which he clearly came to invest with symbolic

importance:

"Years ago, when working alone, I prized aside a large section of coal and fell into some old workings...It proved to be an old forgotten colliery that had been closed over sixty years... <sup>44</sup> ...The neatness of those old workings made our places seem quite slovenly. Not a stone was laid out of place, the ribs of the coal were cut perfectly straight and strong, well-built walls made a deal of posting unnecessary. They had been worked in more leisurely times, when the rush of coal-getting was not so intense, even if the hours were longer." <sup>45</sup>

Coombes notes the immediate result of the breakthrough into the long-

abandoned mine:

"A current of fresh air was coming through these workings. The powder-smoke was cleared in an instant, and our breathing was easier. The haulier threw a handful of dust in the air, and it blew away, instead of hanging in the same place.

'Great, ain't it?' he said, drawing in the fresher air as if it were wine. 'There's a way out through them old workings...' <sup>46</sup>

The repetition, in the context of Coombes's wider discussion of present conditions, hints that recovery of the best of the past is a "way out" in more senses than one. For he has also lamented the move to multiple shift work, partly in terms of the increased danger, partly of the penalties of working 'turn about' with 'cowboys':

"When only one shift is working it leaves time for the workings to be freed of the powder-smoke and the warm air that comes from the breath of a lot of men working at high speed. The workings can rest and settle for a period, and as there is always a moving pressure from the roof on to the

edge of the unworked coal, it happens sometimes that there is a large amount of coal that is squeezed free by the time that a man returns to work in the morning. An experienced collier will help this loosening along by trimming and cleaning the slips of coal, so that they can slacken and give him easy coal for the morrow - for the slips of coal lie on one another like the leaves of a book, and must be lifted one by one. The careful workman will put his timbers where they are needed, and will see that they are solid and well sloped. When the double shift is worked, the good man must suffer if a poor workman is sent to work on the other shift - and the officials often arrange it that way. His loose coal will be taken, and only a dry face of coal left; timber may not be placed at all, or may be badly placed and, as such, be a death trap...There is the method, too, of forcing one shift to beat the other at output, and this can only be done by neglecting the timbering. The careful man insists on putting the place safe, so he gets behind on his coal output, is reprimanded, and goes short in his pay, or is sacked." 47

If the increase of danger from the relentless exploitation of men and of nature in the pursuit of profit is a dominant theme so is the general conflict of interest between owners and managers on the one hand, and miners on the other: how the former seek to divide (and rule) the latter, how conditions of reward set man against man (and against 'nature')<sup>48</sup> and how solidarity within the union is the miner's only resort.

One of the strongest impressions one takes away from These Poor Hands is of the miners' relentless search for work, of the lengths they would go to to 'get a start'. Often during the lean inter-war years they would, after walking or cycling many miles to a pit rumoured to need extra men, be lucky to get a single shift - and be worse off for their pains.<sup>49</sup> Once in work a miner depended for reward not only on physique, health and luck but also on skill, knowledge and understanding - of two kinds; first



as regards the work itself; second in relation to the intricate systems of reward.

There is involved in the work Coombes describes and explains - as also becomes apparent in reading the accounts of work experience offered by working-class writers in the 'third moment'<sup>50</sup> - a formidable degree of skill and knowledge. What is implied in the last passage quoted and in his accounts of the adaptable problem-solving of the colliery repairers<sup>51</sup> - a branch of work he became increasingly involved in - serve as examples.

Skill of a different order was essential if a pitman was to get just reward for his labour. In all four of his books and elsewhere he goes into detail about rates and systems of payment, and he is at pains to explain the crucial role of the union checkweighman who checked on behalf of the miners "the tonnage weighed by the colliery weighman".<sup>52</sup> Among the fullest accounts is that in chapter four of Those Clouded Hills.<sup>53</sup>

From this one reels somewhat at the variety of systems and rates of pay, carefully-graded to provide incentives for undertaking the worst jobs: to harness desperation; at the luck factor (size of seam in your 'stall' affecting ease of working and personal productivity); at the vigilance demanded of the pitman if he is not to be cheated of his earnings; at how much of his energy and time, and that of officials and committeemen, is expended on all this secondary activity. These matters remain a preoccupation: in 1953 he updates his exposition of reward systems and, among other things, offers a useful demystification of the elusive notion of average wages:

"...most miners are surprised when they hear those figures and probably their wives are also. They know that more than half the mining workers are on the day wage rate of seven pounds, six shillings and sixpence, or possibly another shilling a day if classed as especially skilled. They feel that the higher wages of the officials, contractors, and administrators have been included to get that high average. Also that their own overtime, when they manage to work it, and also the Saturday extra shift for the day men is being used as propaganda against any claim for a higher wage for the lower paid men." <sup>54</sup>

A skill important to the miner's survival was that of being equal to the wiles of unscrupulous officials. One story - again it recurs throughout his work - is of when he and Tommy, young miners physically mature but industrially innocent, were offered a pound bonus if they could fill thirty six trams in a week in a difficult 'district'. They slaved to achieve this while pairs of colleagues managed twenty.

"We realised, when it was too late, that we had been the cause of the rate being fixed so low that the men were always afterwards driven like slaves in an attempt to force them to earn as near their money as possible, while there was no hope of them getting a shilling over their rate."

It was a 'Road-to-Damascus situation' for Coombes:

"My regret over the result of this episode and the knowledge that it was our youth and inexperience that had allowed us to make this mistake caused me to attend the general (union) meetings and take more interest in the doings of our committee." <sup>55</sup>

Coombes also refers to official ruses to avoid paying compensation, including blaming miners unfairly for explosions, as at Treblewyd:

"...the manager told us not to go into the other stall-road. He'd been there, and two of the men were inside. But we did go on the sly, and the dead men had only one lamp between them. When the inspector came he found two lamps there, one opened, and they counted as most likely they'd been smoking. Dead men can't argue - see, bachgen - and ever since when I hears of matches been found or opened lamps after an explosion I wonders how they did get there, aye I do." <sup>56</sup>

Coombes's descriptions, analysis and prescriptions funnel out from these issues to deal with the macro aspects of the mining industry. Typically, at the heart of the case he makes for change ( e g to nationalization, degrees of miners' control) is a story - one again that he repeats: another experience he learned from, a pivotal point in development:

"I have a friend who is a delegate for his Lodge to the conferences. At one conference which was held at Margate he saw the same coal - named and specified - that was produced at the colliery where he worked listed in one of the coal-agents' windows at two pounds five a ton. A week before that he found out that the ascertainment board had stated that the total cost of production of this coal to pithead was seventeen shillings a ton. He was confident that seventeen shillings was a high estimate, yet between that coal being placed in the truck and reaching the consumer, someone was sending its price up nearly treble."

57

He then proceeds to an 'evaluation':

"Many colliery companies act as their own sales agents, their own shipping agents, their own timber importers, and probably have large interests in the railway companies. What does it matter to them if they sell their own coal to themselves at a loss, as long as they get a good price for it when they sell it again as agents, then get freightage for shipping it, and make a profit from themselves by selling themselves timber. The more profit they make on the timber, and the more the sales agent makes in commission, the more of a loss the books of the colliery will show." 58

Writing five years later, in Those Clouded Hills, Coombes elaborates the same analysis, and the inference - that an apparent loss is used as a device for holding down miners' pay - gains support.

Coombes sketches radical proposals for change in the mining industry.

These include, with regard to training, again something of a return

59

to the past : advocacy of a comprehensive 'apprenticeship' in place of the unsatisfactory existing system that tended to corrupt miners and set man against man:

"I regret that many men who count themselves trade unionists take advantage of this boy labour to act as sub-contractors and have several boys working for them. When the boy grows old enough to want a man's wage he is not needed, and every chance is taken to be rid of him. He has learned hardly anything of the more skilful tasks of the miner because he has spent his time throwing coal on a moving trough. He is not capable of working a 'stall' on his own, and is too old to have a boy's chance of learning any other trade...The Mines Department has instituted safety classes for boys, with the idea of giving them some preliminary training in the work of mining...but...Mining is an industry that cannot be learned above ground, and I feel that boys should be in charge of (sic) specially experienced and careful men for the first two years of their working life, and conditions should not compel the miner to force the boy to the limit of his strength." 60

There are other sorts of radicalism too. For example Coombes develops proposals for "working a section of the mine on cooperative lines":

"Colliers, boys, repairers, hauliers would all be in the unit, responsible for working their section with as little official interference as possible. Their payment would be the rate of their grade with a bonus quarterly on output to be equally shared. They would pick their representative to report weekly to the miners' committee and they could hold sectional meetings when they thought them necessary. There would be no need for many officials in such a colliery." 61

The most celebrated example of his thinking and concern about the industry is in Picture Post in 1945, in which he calls for "new ideas and new methods" to change a ludicrous situation in which

"Near here is a disused mine and some of my mates are busy trying to find bits of coal in the rubbish. For there is no coal to be bought, and even as I write, we have no coal in this home. Yet from this window I can see the mountain so full of coal that the seams crop out to the daylight." 62

Sir Tom Hopkinson has described the impact of that issue of the magazine:

"'A Plan for Britain' aroused more interest and produced a bigger correspondence than any in the magazine's history... A few weeks later we held a weekend conference at Edward Hulton's house in London to which a number of the letter writers were invited. B L Coombes was there, with other contributors and members of the staff, to take matters a stage further, and from this there were some

quite practical results." 63

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It would be wrong to suggest that Coombes's account of the pit-world underground is one of unrelieved gloom and grievance. The portrayal and his attitude are ambivalent, including a sense of the wonder, strangeness and 'poetry' of working underground. Coombes savours the striking, novel idea of mole-like burrowing 64 "at the heart of creation", 65 of telephones "ringing outside and far inside the mountain" ; the bizarre 66 circumstance of having to keep a jump ahead of the rats in order to 67 ensure that you, and not they, get your meal : an Alice-dream-disordered 68 world where "the holes go upwards" , a world of the strangest symmetries 69 and paradoxes. The opening page of Those Clouded Hills offers the fullest expression of Coombes's wonderment:

"I have examined, by the light of my miner's lamp, exquisite designs of fern leaves impressed on pieces of fallen roof; have seen the exact shapes of petrified mice in the sides of underground roadways, and at one colliery used to pass a place daily where a perfect figure of a stone snake with a lifted head seemed to indicate the way to our new workings."

He is not alone in recognising what Zweig calls "a certain romance and 70 fancy, linked with mountaineering in the bowels of the earth ":

"It seems that Griff, my workmate, has forgotten all about the danger of falling stones and crushing top, for he is standing behind the tram looking intently at a small flake of stone.../In that eight-inch-wide piece of stone is embedded the print of a complete fern leaf. It is a fossil with every strand of the leaf showing plainly.

'A beauty, ain't it?' Griff asks, and I agree. Then Griff puts it carefully in his jacket pocket, because 71 he wants to give it to his son for the school teacher."

Coombes acknowledges the advantages of being an 'underground man':

"Weather does not handicap us and we are often more comfortable underground in the winter time than are the outside workers... We meet adventure daily in our continual battle with nature. There is a great deal of variety in the work and it can scarcely become monotonous. In the mines can be seen examples of the finest comradeship amongst men and an alert outlook, sharpened by

the conditions of working. All men are near equal as there is no servility; the newest labourer gets the same respect from the men as the manager...Pit head baths have lessened the dirt and toil whilst making the miner the cleanest of all manual workers after he leaves work." <sup>72</sup>

Yet he is emphatic, as are the miners Zweig interviews, <sup>73</sup> that his son should not go underground. <sup>74</sup>

Aboveground: "quintessence of dust"

"Won't be a minute, son. I'll just pop these on the line so that they can blow, now that the wind is blowing toward the pit." <sup>75</sup>

"Every morning I wipe the dust coating from the papers." <sup>76</sup>

Dust, which turns hedgerow blackberries black before they can be red, <sup>77</sup>  
<sup>78</sup> which mocks the efforts of washrday wives, which according to some 'authorities' accounts for "the good singing of Welsh choirs" <sup>79</sup>, dust which kills miners, takes on emblematic force in the work of B L Coombes. It figures the dominance of pit over pit-village: the determination of 'super-structural' conditions of living by 'basic' conditions of production. Houses are impossibly cramped and lack basic facilities; their occupancy is conditional on service to the pit. Shift work, especially where several members of a household are miners, and especially before the boon of pit-head baths, means not merely disruption of normal rhythms of waking and sleeping, but a marked effect on all the family <sup>80</sup> and, above all, a

a blighting, week in and week out, of the life of the wife and mother  
 with clothes to dry, water to draw, heat and carry and backs to scrub. <sup>81</sup>

The grim living conditions of mining communities are well known -  
 though because they are easy to forget and/or ignore they can, perhaps,  
 never be portrayed too often. However, one point needs making as it  
 bears on any account of Coombes as a working-class writer. Everything about  
 the life he anatomises bespeaks how little time was left to miners and  
 their wives/mothers after the irreducible daily core activity - changing,  
 travelling to work, <sup>82</sup> heating and carrying water, bathing, washing and  
 drying clothes etc. This factor, added to the constraints of cramped  
 living-space and physical exhaustion after work, suggests why Coombes  
 was, when trying to write in the front bedroom, driven to anger by  
 family noise and to "frenzy" by the racket from the pub next door. <sup>83</sup>

<sup>84</sup>  
 deepens one's awe at his achievement and, further, suggests some of  
 the reasons why working-class writers are at all times relatively 'thin  
 on the ground'. <sup>85</sup>

While Coombes's portrayal of his life is fairly full, the mainstream  
 of pit-village life gets scant attention. There are major and impor-  
 tant absences in his work - notably the worlds of the pub, of betting -  
 and of the chapel. <sup>86</sup> Coombes was, it seems, in some senses at odds with  
 colleagues and neighbours:

"The village disliked but faintly revered 'that writer chap',  
 pardoning Coombes his non-attendance at pub and Chapel and  
 the ritual Sunday promenade." <sup>87</sup>

The following sentences from Miner's Day suggest a flavour of this:

"I do not like sawdust-smirched drinking dens. I want room, and sometimes quiet where I can talk to a friend or read a book or listen to intelligent talk, and I like to sip my rare drinks slowly and appreciatively. I have not yet allowed my throat to become a sewer, or my mind." <sup>88</sup>

In similar vein he condemns (repeatedly) bad books <sup>89</sup> and bad, escapist cinema (singling out Pearl White again and again for especial opprobrium).<sup>90</sup>

His satisfactions and aspirations were those associated with, and characteristically inculcated (by church, chapel and education system) in working-class elites. He was earnest and serious-minded; committed to the value of books,<sup>91</sup> music, drama, discussion, sport,<sup>92</sup> education and hard, productive work (for example, gardening). As one reads of what he most values in culture -

"...as the love for good literature, good drama, and good music is slowly fostered and seeps into the feelings of the adults they take those influences into their homes and the little children absorb it. Thus the way is made easier and brighter for the coming generation until it feels that such cultural pleasures are part of life"

- one is put in mind of Matthew Arnold, and by his feelings for nature,

<sup>93</sup>

of Wordsworth. Much that can be seen as characteristic

(eg rugby, choirs etc) of the essential culture of South Welsh mining communities finds no place.

As suggested above Coombes was committed to conscientious, well-informed, intelligent union activity and reflected interestingly upon it. This was part of an encompassing set of socialist attitudes, fuelled by passionate hatred of injustice, that outcrop from time to time in his work - usually, and significantly, triggered by a moving experience. Such a passage occurs in These Poor Hands after he has described an encounter with three unemployed men tramping the countryside in search of work:

"I hate the continual slavery and dust; the poor clothes and bare living; the need for decent men to beg their bread; the huge van that comes around every Friday and disgorges four beefy ex-policemen, who rush into a house and come out with the furniture of some miner, whilst he stands whitefaced on the side, with his children crying and asking what is the



matter; the eviction from his home of some miner who has opened his mouth too wide or refused to be robbed of his wages when they were due...This world is so full of good things; there is plenty for all." <sup>94</sup>

Coombes floats schemes and proposals for the improvement of the above-ground life of his community, just as he does for its life underground.

He applauds the Sankey Commission levy which financed miners' institutes,

libraries, parks etc and argues for its extension; <sup>95</sup> he sketches schemes

for improved housing <sup>96</sup> and education <sup>97</sup> and proposes that staging union

conferences in the Rhondda Valley rather than at Margate might concentrate

delegates' minds in fruitful ways; <sup>98</sup> he condemns the prosecution of

those who search mine tips "for a bagfull": coal which would otherwise

go to waste. <sup>99</sup> His most fully-worked-out scheme -outlined several times <sup>100</sup> -

is for miners to be settled on small-holdings, thus making use of land

presently going to waste, improving the standard and quality of miners'

lives, and answering what David Smith calls "the yearning of generations

hustled off the land". <sup>101</sup> This proposal reflects Coombes's abiding in-

terest in farming and his enthusiasm for hard work ("Never again would

(an energetic man) need to linger about a street corner") <sup>102</sup>; however,

its implementation would presumably involve a physical and psychological

dispersal of tightly-knit mining communities which Coombes does not men-

tion and certainly does not lament.

A persistent minor preoccupation of his work is the changing ratio

of local to non-local miners and its implications. Improved transport

has led to more miners travelling further to work. Coombes lists the

pros and cons: the latter preponderant, the former all for management.

There is the expense to the miner - of money and time. In addition

"The officials often prefer to engage men from a distance because those men are difficult to organise. They must hurry to their conveyances, and cannot attend a meeting or anything that concerns the work. If they are a shilling or two short in their money it will not pay them to come to see about it." <sup>103</sup>

Outsiders develop grievances towards locals at having to pay

"...towards institutions that they cannot use, and have to allow deductions from their pay for welfare schemes, bands, nursing services, etc, that they live too far from to enjoy." <sup>104</sup>

Into this local/non-local issue other strands are woven. As has been

<sup>105</sup>  
noted in the work of Samuel Bamford there is a sense of the

importance of knowing those with whom you live and work. In addition

'outsiders' (i.e. workers from a train journey - or longish bus journey - away) tend to be at the least simply less worthy -

"Those from the larger towns are not so amenable and show little respect for the advice of more experienced workmen or for institutions of the mining communities" <sup>106</sup>

<sup>107</sup>  
- and quite possibly likely to give miners a bad name. Local/country

and non-local/town take on for Coombes some of the meanings they have

acquired in the literature Raymond Williams has explored <sup>in</sup> The Country and

<sup>108</sup>  
the City. The entire matter is charged with ambivalences and contra-

dictions. Coombes frequently celebrates the meeting of peoples, the contribution of the "industrial invaders" to the rich cultural admixture of the valleys - not forgetting that he was such an invader himself.

- Any survey of the matter of Coombes's work uncovers contradictions and a sense of tensions in play. There is, for example, in his work a

gut individualism, co-existing with acknowledgement of the need for and value of collective activity.<sup>110</sup> However, there is a force and conviction in the expression of the former that is absent from the latter. It has been suggested above that in one simple sense Coombes was simultaneously both insider and outsider. It seems that this tension operated at a number of levels; for example, it informs the 'how' of the writing, the I/We relationship, the coexisting dual roles of observer and participant. An analysis of these tensions, dichotomies, dualities illuminates the work and experience not only of Coombes but also of other working-class writers, in his time and at other times.

Manner: 'insider/outsider'

### Style

The world of mines and miners is to the outsider inherently romantic, a Manichaeian universe of striking opposites and conflicts: black/white, death/life, darkness/light, underground/surface, black/diamond, dirt/riches, muck/brass, foul air/fresh air, hell/heaven, slave/master, hero/villain; man/nature, man/man.

It is a world

that urges on the writer a melodramatic vision, made-to-measure phrases, similes and metaphors, and invites overwriting. B L Coombes, like

George Orwell,<sup>111</sup> Walter Brierley,<sup>112</sup> and Roger Dattler,<sup>113</sup> manages to evoke this world in sober, restrained terms with what John Lehmann refers to as:

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— "the simplicity and unforced, quiet movement of the writing".

Coombes is at his best in evoking the world underground, some aspects of life in the pit communities above and, at times, in his portrayal of

the natural world. His best work evinces an economy of style, a forceful understatement:

"We had not been at work more than an hour on my first night when a piece of clod fell on him. He was between four posts in a cage, where he had barely room to move his mandril, and there was not a yard between the farthest posts - yet a piece of stone fell between these posts. It did not fall more than eighteen inches, and it weighed only half a hundredweight. It hit him on the back when he was kneeling, and, although he was young and strong, he has never walked since" 115

"Try shovelling eighteen tons or so of stone rubbish over a wall that is quite five feet high whilst the temperature is about ninety five-degrees " 116

"We cut one another's hair, but kept our caps on for a while afterwards" (during the 1921 lock-out) 117

"The attempt to fill the tram before putting up the post has filled many coffins." 118

Coombes has a poet's eye for telling detail -

"There is one clear chalkmark on the partition behind the driver and five smudges where the mark has been rubbed away...tomorrow morning we will get rid of that one as a sign that we have worked the last shift for that week " 119

and, like Orwell (notoriously) a good nose:

"We always have a short stroll around to see what has been done since our last shift. In the stalls...I notice how each absent man has left his smell behind him. The one who ate onions with his snap of food, the other who washes with scented soap, the brilliantine which slicked another's hair, the plug tobacco which another chewed to his content, the minty smell of another's chewing gum..." 120

Coombes's sureness of touch is of course far from unfailing. His handling of non-standard speech provides an example. It is competent when lightly suggested -

"Made you jump, did it? That was a shot for ripping top, that was. Oughter have warned us, they did" - 121

less successful when a fuller rendering is attempted, especially of speech (here that of a Durham miner) unfamiliar to Coombes:

"Naw! Aht with it. What abaht that what ah tole to thee, eh?...

Answer me that, tha' gret gowk...

Say summat, tha' gret gowk, if tha's not afeared.

Tha' dursent. Tha's afeared...

Tha' sees? They'm a bunch o' bloody twisters. They are, an' all." <sup>122</sup>

(Coombes nearly always renders his own contribution to dialogues in unalloyed standard; his use of non-standard dialect is bound up with his attitude towards his colleagues, as I shall argue below).

In respect of all four of his books, because of a variousness of intention and therefore of form (of which more in the following section) - and of influences - there is an eclectic and matching variousness: of styles, tones, writing modes: a commingling of narrative, descriptive, polemical, expressive, celebratory, lyrical, analytical and so on. While there are passages of precise 'transactional' writing, <sup>123</sup> descriptions of mining processes that would gladden the heart of Mr Gradgrind - or any BTEC examiner <sup>124</sup> - there are also many cases of ill-judgement stemming from momentary loss of faith in a 'vigorous vernacular':

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"The old story - don't do as I do but do as I advise you."  
(My emphases).

At times he takes, stylistically, the high road - Chapter 10, especially p 110, of Miner's Day is merely among the worst examples. On such occasions he will, say, develop a simile so ingenious as to draw attention to itself rather than illuminate the matter in hand:

"...the intricate turnings of a colliery where the roadways branch through the mountain like the bloodvessels spread through an egg which is near hatching " <sup>126</sup>

or we will sense him standing, tonally and lexically, painfully on tiptoe. In respect of such unevenness he is reminiscent of Thomas Hardy by whom, I speculate, he was markedly influenced at a number of levels. <sup>127</sup>

Another noticeable influence on technique is the then young and flourishing documentary tradition in film and print - and perhaps also in

radio: all fields in which Coombes had both interest and experience. <sup>128</sup>

The influence of documentary film is strikingly apparent at points throughout the four books. This passage, from the opening of Those Clouded Hills (2), is strongly suggestive of say, a panning shot in Humphrey Jennings:

"I'll take you over the colliery screens to see the coal being treated; over the yards where large stocks of material must always be maintained; past the great engine houses and under the steel arches to where the water and the rushing air current meets you..."

Similarly, a chapter opening from 'I am a Miner' -

"I watched him coming up the slope toward me, between the two narrow sets of rails, and I thought how puny he was to match his body against the mountain" <sup>129</sup>

- calls to mind countless establishing shots of miners approaching/leaving the pit-head in film and T V documentary and news footage. Again, the following fragment -

"Look with me and visualise a boy, or rather a youth. We'll assume he is eighteen, about five feet eight. Clear eyed and of a friendly nature. His lips curl in a smile and he looks happily towards the future" <sup>130</sup>

illustrates Coombes's characteristic and strong visual sense while the

opening page or so of 'The Way we Live Now - I' <sup>131</sup> - an account of pitmen approaching the mine (a characteristic motif in Coombes) in war-time blackout conditions where sounds take on unusual salience - suggest

radio documentary: 'actuality' <sup>132</sup> plus voice-over, perhaps.

### Style and external nature

A consideration of Coombes's rendering of external nature raises a number of interesting questions. There are passages evoking 'nature' -

great sweeps of mountain landscape and detailed miniatures, below ground and above - dotted throughout his work. They evidently spring from sincere, felt responses but ~~are~~ mostly uneven, flawed:

"There were waterfalls as well. One in particular, where a mountain stream rushed out and fell for eighty feet. It was a brown torrent in winter, roaring in fright when it took that terrific leap and carried trees and sometimes sheep with it on to the rocks below, but in the summer it was a wide veil of water, the spray from which kissed the primrose roots amongst the rocky sides to new life and beauty." <sup>133</sup>

"...rushed out and fell", "wide veil" are impressive; "in fright", "and beauty" might not survive rigorous revision; "kissed" works onomatopoeically but lost freshness too long ago to commend itself. David Smith, offering a collage of fragments (from three sources), <sup>134</sup> has this to say:

"When he writes of the joys he feels in communing with Nature his prose lurches into abstraction, the construction becomes slack and the words strain to carry the weight of his indefinite sensation before Beauty. The response, however sincere the feeling, is a literary one; he writes in a tradition and a manner which is false to him. The result is anonymity...What saves Coombes from this limpness, from being a feeble imitator of 'fine' writing is the pressure put upon his humanity and on his perception by his life as a collier. When he describes this life all the fat leaves his writing so that it comes out lucid, spare, tense. Metaphor and assumption are expunged and there is no desperate reaching for a linguistic vehicle for what is inexpressible in direct language. Coombes wants to tell it plain. The colliers' life is a living death, and too often in a literal sense; he recites a litany of splintered bones and squashed bodies until the bleakness of this mournful threnody absolves his writing from obeisance to anything other than his own knowledge and indignation. The prose now moves urgently from one ascertainable fact or feeling to another until the whole memory has been regurgitated." <sup>135</sup>

While I agree with David Smith's assessment of the fragments he cites I feel he does less than justice to Coombes's evocation of 'nature' (below and above ground - and leaving aside human relationship with it) and more than justice to his writing (taken as a whole) about "his life as a collier".

In addition certain of the assumptions that lie behind the above remarks (for example about "Metaphor and simile" and "direct language") seem

questionable. On the specific issue of writing about 'nature' there are difficult issues involved into which the above remarks may act as a springboard.

First, the 'sub-text' of much writing-about-working-class-writing suggests a legitimate 'agenda' for working-class writers: the grimmest aspects of urban working-class experience (plus, preferably, working-class struggle), radical analysis and prescriptions for radical change. (Here it needs saying that David Smith does not proclaim any such a programme - in fact just before the passage quoted he has noticed and I think lamented certain absences (brass-bands, banners, marches, rugby) from Coombes's work, and this tends the other way.) Of the somewhat caricatured 'agenda' sketched above it can be speculated that 'insider' accounts of working-class experience are, because they are so rare, what seize the interest of most readers. However, any narrowing of what working class writers should write about is surely to be resisted. Coombes, albeit an admirer of George Borrow's Wild Wales (as was Alfred Williams of Richard Jeffries), nevertheless ran a countryman's eye - and latterly a small holder's and increasingly an environmentalist's eye - over the landscape and was genuinely responsive to his physical environment (natural and man-made, above and below ground) - as his books, stories, and journalism all testify - and there is no sense that his offering of slabs of 'nature' arose from a feeling that it was expected of him, or of 'literature'.



Second - the main issue here - given the trajectories of literary history since the mid-eighteenth century and the associated importance of writing-about-external-nature within our culture, it has become notoriously difficult to write powerfully and freshly on this aspect of experience.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, the problem is even more acute for working-class writers because the central ground of this tradition has been dominated by writers of other classes. In this connection Burns and Clare are obvious exceptions, and the experience of Stephen Duck<sup>138</sup> and perhaps that of Keats (contemptuously dubbed "tadpole of the Lakes" and allocated to "the Cockney School" by Byron) and certainly Charles Parker's discussion of the writing problems in this respect of a Banbury shoemaker,<sup>139</sup> are illuminating. Similarly illuminating would be some proper consideration of the use of 'external nature' made by working-class writers - e g symbolic (Lewis Jones, George Garrett), as means of escape from general grimness (Walter Greenwood, Walter Brierley), as unique source of privacy (Harold Heslop, Walter Brierley) - and their attitudes towards nature and its portrayal ("I saw no reason to write like Wordsworth").<sup>140</sup>

## Structure

These Poor Hands, as its subtitle proclaims, <sup>141</sup> is autobiography; as such chronology is its chief organising principle. The other three books are essentially 'insider' documentaries about the experience of mining and mining communities. However, the former, as its punning title suggests, ranges beyond recording personal experience to discuss both the experience of others and broad industrial, political, literary, educational and other matters, and - as I argue below - shows signs of fictive shaping. Similarly, the latter are everywhere and inevitably personal and subjective: experience and reflection mingle with detached description and sometimes analysis. 'I am a Miner', like Herbert Hodge's contribution to the same series discussed above, <sup>142</sup> adopts a single mining day as its framework; Those Clouded Hills and Miners Day are altogether more loosely structured.

All four books feature a recurrent pattern: Coombes recalls and describes an incident whose telling gives rise to reflection and "evaluation" <sup>143</sup> The strong tendency is to move from 'story' to 'discourse' and his characteristic mode is parabolic - which, Charles Parker has asserted, "is the strength of working-class testimony." <sup>144</sup> In the overwhelming majority of his Neath Guardian pieces over thirty years the formula is precisely this: particular anecdote giving rise to general reflection, local issue viewed in a national/international context, and vice versa - the whole <sup>145</sup> unified by a common theme. The effects of this are subtle: suggesting the primacy of lived experience over, and as a basis for, abstraction and context-free system building, and the importance of narrative. Coombes's

interest and importance derive from first his 'experience', second his alchemical capacity to turn it by means of a visibly growing analytical power - fuelled by his widening reading - into 'knowledge' <sup>146</sup> and from, third, his capacity (rarely exemplified among working men and women denied education) <sup>147</sup> to evoke and discuss his experience on paper. The 'experience/knowledge' issue arises importantly in debates around working-class writing of the 'third moment' <sup>148</sup> and is taken up below.

A fictive dimension: actual and representative: individual and type

Within the autobiography and reportage of his four books there is a discernible fictive tendency. Its importance to understanding the context and development of his work - and the nature of publishing opportunities for working-class writers of the 'second moment' - is considerable and will be discussed in the following section. The argument here is that Coombes's approach often features kinds of selection, structuring, organisation, shaping, uses of language and so on that are strikingly fictive: that events, though rendered as historical and actual seem often to be representative composites, and that while ostensibly presenting actual individuals Coombes, novelist-like, <sup>149</sup> seems to gather together traits, attitudes etc so that what he often portrays are 'types' - literary 'characters' introduced to serve purposes beyond themselves.

Examples of the latter abound and Miners Day is especially rich in this respect. Benjy, (9ff) "a dancing bundle of profanity", is in a long tradition (Everyman, Ben Jonson, Smollett, Dickens perhaps). He is a

type of limited, lovable, comic working-man; a stereotypically fine Welsh singer (from the 'Land of Song'),<sup>150</sup> kitted out with malapropisms and fixed phrases and attributes, frozen in attitudes which never alter and by which he is to be 'known':

"Benjy has two ever-recurring questions whenever a workman approaches him in the mine. They are: 'Where is he?' (he being the fireman) and 'What time is it?'"<sup>151</sup>

He is more a "bundle" of qualities than a flesh and blood man. On the same page we meet George, a newcomer, who will be useful to Coombes in that he will need to have explained to him things which the reader can overhear and needs to know - a dramatic function especially familiar in Shakespeare.<sup>152</sup>

As regards the portrayal and structuring of events a closer, more extended examination is needed to develop the argument. There is room perhaps for two thematically linked examples.

The first, also from Miners Day, shows Coombes organizing a narrative to embody a theme - the menace to miners from 'dust' - and to introduce a discussion of 'compensation'. Chapter Two opens:

"Jerry had always been useful about the house: he had a hatred of idle hours."<sup>153</sup>

We are in media res; he has not been mentioned before. Then his garden and glasshouse are described: we approach him through what he has made. Next his gasping deterioration is sketched and we dart into his mind:

"There" (in a porch he had recently made) "he hoped to sit through the spring, watching the garden become fruitful."

Then we realise first that Coombes, not Jerry, is sitting in that porch; then that Jerry is dead: that those uncomfortable tenses had posited a present not of the disabled miner gasping - but dead. There follows

an ever-growing procession to the church (the bared heads of onlookers; vehicles slowing in respect); the church full of men remembering relatives similarly dead from dust, perhaps speculating on their own chances of avoiding the same fate; the punning coincidence (dropped into the writer's lap) of "Dust to dust ". Cut to that evening: external nature, mountain and stream, at its mocking, poignant loveliest; Coombes at his worst evoking it:

"...the mountain was covering itself with a green dress and a cluster of birds in the fir trees sang a gentle farewell to the day and the man."<sup>154</sup>

On his walk Coombes takes a short cut up a little slope:

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"That sharp slope is a sort of barometer in our lives."

How easily miners climb it indicates how little or how much progress the 'dust' has made. Dan, unemployed and dying of the dust, is resting at a stile half way up. They talk of Jerry's funeral, but what is uppermost in both their minds is left unspoken. Coombes sketches the story of Dan's decline:

"I had watched it coming with Dan. He was getting weaker and more easily exhausted, yet he knew no alternative but dragging himself to work. Then that time when we had to help him up and he came no more. They fear going to their doctor because he would tell them to cease work, and they have no other way of living."<sup>156</sup>

That unobtrusive shift from "He" to "They" is the move from particular to general, from 'story' to 'discourse', 'experience' to reflection, anecdote to 'evaluation' and heralds a discussion of miners' compensation. Coombes, has presented by narrative and dramatic means a quintessence of dust, disability, disease and deterioration; he has

used action, dialogue and juxtaposition economically to control the sequence of reader experiences, to affect the reader as a novelist might want to do, to deliver him/her to the 'hard' case about compensation he wants to make.

These Poor Hands, from which my second example is drawn, is structured as follows. After ten pages which ~~take us to his~~ departure from Herefordshire in 1911 the next two hundred pages bring the story up to the writing present: the late 1930s. The great bulk of this - a blend of narrative and reflection, of that 'leaping and lingering' which memory among other things imposes on all autobiography - deals with the (for Coombes highly formative) period up to and including the General Strike of 1926. Thereafter chronology loses its grip on structure. Coombes then, as it were, tries three doors to get out of his book.

Chapter Twelve takes stock: signalling his approach to the present by the use, chiefly, of perfect and present tenses, Coombes tells of his books and his music and what they 'mean' to him; outlines his 'philosophy of life': what he values; inveighs against social injustice. <sup>157</sup> The final chapter (fourteen) takes us through the preparation for, journey to and working of a night shift - fear, danger, a narrow escape, banter, a beautiful fern-printed fossil: a prototype of the compressed-typical shift he was to use as a structural device in each of his three other books - and on to escape into the dawn: exit from the book.

In between is Chapter Thirteen, my second example. It illustrates Coombes's novelist's feel for the value of the large, set-piece scene/event which brings many people together and allows the economical depiction of their situation and interrelationships and a context for

passages of intense illumination; and, like the foregoing passage, his feel for the advantage to be gained from clustering events together so as to augment their thematic force. In what follows I first outline the structure of Chapter Thirteen then try to suggest what light its examination casts on the kind of writer Coombes was and perhaps aspired to be.

The opening paragraph is important and interesting:

"I have had a shock to-day. Of course, we expect shocks on Friday, because it is our pay-day, but this one was not the usual "day-short" or "extra-deduction" sort of surprise; it was the reappearance of one of my old mates - Billy Ward."

It suggests Coombes writing, diarist-like, late in a day before going to bed; it affords an example of that rarish phenomenon: a Coombes joke. 159

Most importantly it operates proleptically and provides a frame for what is to follow: although we are not to meet Billy Ward for a further seventeen pages we are expecting him, and we read what intervenes differently because of this. What does intervene is a sustained (though not one hundred per cent consistent) present-tense narrative, as follows. First, after a short sleep following a night shift, a four-mile walk through a valley whose beauty is in marked (spelled-out) contrast with the mine and the mining going on beneath, an aside about making tourists (?) get out

of their cars and inhale a little dust, 160 before arrival at the colliery to collect his pay (£2 8s 6d). After a glimpse of two groups

of injured miners ("It resembles the dressing-station after a battle") - 161

One waiting for their compensation pay, the other for examination by compensation doctors to see if they qualify - Coombes feeling in need

of a bracer pays a rare visit to a nearby pub. There follows a moving encounter (seven pages) with Dai, a miner dying of and so transformed by silicosis that Coombes does not at first recognise him. With great effort Dai tells his story. Coombes (but for "respiration" and perhaps "breathing-organs" at his impressive best) reports it -

"The stone-dust had got inside his lungs, then every respiration had damaged and torn the delicate lining of the chest - as if rough stones were being rubbed inside a silken pocket handkerchief. This dust accumulated in his breathing-organs, then closed together like cement. When the lungs were torn they were no longer air-tight" <sup>162</sup>

and lucidly explains the difficulties that "hard-ground" men face in trying to wring compensation from their employers. Dai, abjectly, is trying to raffle his gramophone. All present buy tickets, including a group of miners playing bagatelle who whisper to each other in astonishment at Dai's condition. <sup>163</sup> Next, sipping his second half of Guinness, Coombes observes a noisy group of miners enter the bar direct from their early shift, many of them sub-contracted youngsters whose pay packets await them on the bar. This gives rise to a passage describing and inveighing against the worsening situation of beginning miners and a thematically-related anecdote. Coombes leaves the pub and there follows description of the pay-day scene outside: beggars; a comely flag-seller with coal dust settling on her make-up; "cheap-jacks" and an ice-cream seller; children peering intently at groups of miners leaving the pit, trying to identify the features of their fathers among the blackened faces; miners queuing to pay their union dues; at the station a porter



sweeping and re-sweeping the coal dust from his platforms. On the colliers' train back home - no cushions to the seats, the woodwork blackened - there is a nice 'insider' detail:

"I know that in every little niche of these carriages I should find cigarettes or matches - or pipes - hidden if I were to search..." 164

Home is a pay-day village of greengrocers' and fish-and-chip carts, insurance and tally men, miners returning from the early shift. Before we re-enter Coombes's house and at last meet Billy Ward there is an interesting passage that if encountered out of context would scarcely suggest its author:

"A young cockle-woman wearing boots that hid most of her shapely calves, and with a plaid shawl pinned across a full bosom, walked down the street with strides that tautened the short skirt she wore. She had a white basket on her right arm, and turned her head as far as the balancing of the tub on her head would allow to inquire of a woman standing in her doorway:-

'Shu da chi hethi? Cockles hethi?'" 165

Billy Ward is an old workmate who had, under pressure of circumstances, blacklegged in 1926; now, revealingly, he is smoking Woodbines rather than his wonted Players. Together the two miners walk past Billy's old cottage and off up the mountain. Billy gives his news: Hutch, who has figured prominently in one phase of Coombes's working life, is dead - at thirty-five - killed at work by a roof-fall. Billy narrates the incident, in which he has narrowly escaped death himself, as though he needs to exorcise the memory of it and of his own behaviour in its aftermath: 166

Hutch and Billy, driven to work on in an obviously dangerous spot, in

spite of their warnings and protests, by threats of the sack from a harsh fireman; Hutch's hideously crushed body; Billy vomiting; Billy later not challenging the official cover-up version so as not to imperil the family's claim to prompt compensation. The chapter ends with Coombes agreeing to put in a word for Billy at his pit.

This look at a single chapter of Coombes's major book reveals, alongside what is to be expected of autobiography and documentary, trace elements of fiction. So much - and so much that is grist to his mill - crops up in and is compressed into a single Friday afternoon that the overwhelming sense even more so than in the preceding example is rather of the patterning of fiction than of the circumstantial, faithful, literal account of actual events it purports to be. It is of course possible that what is described occurred exactly thus and that Coombes fitted in at least some of the writing before, presumably, going to work that night; and in any case he is not under oath to provide a literal truth in this narrow sense. Beyond this quibble is the light the chapter casts on Coombes as a writer.

The compression, economy, suggestiveness and patterning displayed here is, in the context of autobiography/documentary, striking - and characteristic of how novelists, poets and dramatists go about their work. What is recoverable is a strong sense of artistic design, of which perhaps three broad features are indicative.

First there is shaping of the account of an afternoon by means of a pattern of structured contrasts - the "grand day" above ground - and

conditions below:

"Underneath the mountain that is over to my right more than a thousand of my mates are shut away from the sight of this day. They are swallowing dust with each gasping breath; they are knocking pieces out of their hands or bodies because of the feeble light..."; 167

mountain and colliery; the two groups of injured miners; an old, ruined miner barely able to whisper and the noisy young hopefuls; colliery village and home village; the continuing heat haze of the afternoon contrasted with Billy's "inner weather":

"'Just as dreary as it was, like, ain't it?' Billy looks at the grey streets and sees no change in them." 168

Next, the deliberate care taken over the mode of narrative is striking; the key note is variety. The chapter as a whole is cast in first-person present tense. This suggests (as always in fiction ?) 169 a highly-wrought deliberateness, a bid for a literary effect of immediacy and intimacy: an invitation to the reader to undergo experiences along with the author. The two major "inset narratives" (the stories of Dai and Billy) are rendered in, respectively, "erlebte Rede" - a "type of reported speech which...can give narrative speed as well as 170 suggesting a speaker's typical idiom" and a blend of this with straight past-tense narrative by Billy. The impact of both narratives 171 is enhanced by devices indicating to us how we should react to them: in the latter Coombes himself models appropriate supportive comment; in the former the miners playing bagatelle, like figures in a Thomas Hardy

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'rustic chorus', whisper their astonishment at Dai's ghost-like

appearance in a conversation reproduced verbatim by Coombes and which we accept, conventionally, as we would such a passage in a first-person <sup>173</sup>  
fictional narrative.

Before we leave matters of narrative technique perhaps two further points require notice: the dust motif which reaches climax in Dai's story and its dying-fall decline afterwards; and the touches by which, following the opening paragraph already discussed, a sense of expectancy and foreboding is developed for us to share. For example, although he has responded fully to the beauty of the mountain valley, Coombes later writes:

"Somehow I crave for a stimulant today. My nerves are upset  
 ... I feel so shaky that I must have a drink..." <sup>174</sup>

He chooses not to reduce the reader's uncertainty about the significance of Billy until the last possible moment; in view of the dust-theme we more than half expect Billy too to be dying of the dust - and Coombes seems to 'string us along':

"We had a visitor at our house when I got there. I should have known that it was Billy Ward by that habit of rubbing his finger along his chin, even if I had not seen his face. His face would not have guided me so well, for he was altered very much." <sup>175</sup>

A third novel-like quality is the preponderance of showing over telling. Although, as usual, narrative continually gives rise to comment the impact on readers is achieved by the portrayal of events - the encounter with Dai is the best example - which are most eloquent when left to speak for themselves, and by allowing 'characters' likewise to proclaim themselves. In the idiom of traditional fiction analysis Billy Ward might be described as a character introduced to serve plot

and themes: in his appearances he bids to become a very type of the unheroic miner - his moral unheroism imposed by a pressing expediency made virtually inescapable by economic conditions.

To conclude this discussion - none of the foregoing analysis argues either that the passages examined are entirely successful - for example the narrative of Hutch's death, planned and signalled as the climax, is because of the overwhelming immediacy of our earlier and closer encounter with Dai, something of an anti-climax. Nor does it argue that Coombes's work was the better the more it aspired to the condition of fiction, though here the disclaimer is more hesitant. The importance lies in what is revealed of his modes, approaches, repertoire as a writer: what he made of his opportunities. Bernard Sharratt, in a study of Samuel Bamford, makes an observation that applies in all its aspects equally well to Coombes:

"Passages (in the Life of a Radical ... verges on,  
without ever quite clearly becoming, a work our  
responses to which are controlled and guided by  
literary techniques more often to be expected in  
novels and imaginative writing generally than  
in apparently simple narrative...The writing - the  
style and structure - is a fusion of historical  
documentary, personal narrative, and imaginative  
literature - if such category-terms can be allowed  
to stand." 176

### B L Coombes and the 'second moment'

The analysis above serves to re-introduce the discussion of the 'second moment' begun in considering the work and experience of Herbert Hodge; also to open up discussion of the factors that helped determine the kind of writer Coombes became.

Coombes everywhere conveys a sense of the urgency of what he had to say to "the country and the world" (see, for example, his words prefixed to this chapter). His sense of urgency was coupled with a driving ambition to be a writer and to get into print:

"He was... an habitual writer with an all-consuming belief in his own literary genius..." <sup>177</sup>

These twin drives from within coincided with certain tendencies of the time.

### The 'Second Moment'

Coombes, like Herbert Hodge, must be considered fortunate to the extent that he 'found his time': a propitious 'moment' when a number of 'progressive' and Left organisations and individuals - and others - were eager and able to publish accounts of working-class experience, interest in which stemmed partly from the (Marx-derived) view that the working-class held the key to political transformation. Fact has been discussed.

The Left Book Club, which published These Poor Hands, is another - perhaps the best and best-known - example. Like Fact it was fuelled by

"the passion to make people see", <sup>178</sup> by "a deep-seated desire for

political education". <sup>179</sup> An insert leaflet in my copy of These Poor

Hands proclaims:

"The aim of the Left Book Club is a simple one: it is to help in the terribly urgent (my emphasis) struggle for World Peace & a better social & economic order & against Fascism, by giving (to all who are determined to play their part in this struggle) such knowledge as will immensely increase their efficiency."

To these examples may be added Left Review (key figures including Edgell Rickword and Montagu Slater, publishing short stories and poems and running literary competitions - and offering prizes and writerly advice to competitors); The Adelphi (John Middleton Murry, Richard Rees and Max Plowman publishing Jack Common and George Garrett); the initiatives associated with Douglas Garman, Martin Lawrence and Simon Wishart (publishers of Lewis Jones's Cumardy and We Live and Harold Heslop's Last Cage Down; H G Wells backing Jim Phelan and so on. Further, the impressive number of very often single working-class titles (mostly novels) in the lists of 'mainstream' publishers in the 'second moment' suggests that, as has been observed, it was fashionable for every publishing house to have one working-class writer in its list. 180

This tendency towards the publication of the experiences and opinions of 'ordinary' working-class people - a further striking development was Mass Observation - became more and more widespread into the onset of World War II. As a latish example within the 'second moment' Coombes's article (4 January 1941) in a Picture Post "looking ahead to a nation at peace" 181 is to be seen in a context of reconstruction, portrayed as

follows by David Smith:

"The 1939-1945 War pressured the more sheltered parts of British society into widening this impassioned debate, into allowing men like Coombes to proclaim the wasted values he had seen and to participate in those reforming impulses which followed in the wake of the War." 182

### Middle-class 'gatekeepers'

Within the context of publication sketched here it was always necessary (as the experience of Herbert Hodge exemplifies) for working-class writers to get past (usually) middle-class 'gatekeepers'. Fact had its editorial board of Left middle-class intellectuals; Victor Gollancz "dominated" the Left Book Club - and so on. The key figure in the story of Coombes's success - the most sympathetic 'gatekeeper' he seems to have encountered - was John Lehmann.

### John Lehmann

In order to understand the role of John Lehmann in Coombes's story - and to suggest some of the dominant tendencies of the 'second moment' - it is necessary first to consider briefly the nature of John Lehmann's project: the 'midwifing' of a great deal of important writing, much of it by working-class writers. (Among other things such a consideration suggests how far the 'midwifing' metaphor is appropriate).

Lehmann's involvement in New Signatures (1932) and New Country (1933) was part of a vigorous reaction

"against the characteristic post-war mood of futility and against the general trend among the writers of the 'twenties to dissociate themselves from current social and political problems." 184

At least two interweaving strands ran through this. On the one hand there was the attack on isolation and political dissociation; on the other a 'literary' assault on "private riddles", on what Michael Roberts referred to as

"esoteric work which was frivolously decorative or elaborately erudite..." 185



Politically, as economic crisis deepened and Hitler came to power,

Lehmann went with the general "swing towards the Left".<sup>186</sup> However,

it is clear that his dominant interest, his projects and their origins were first and foremost literary. He wrote in 1955 that he became

"inexplicably bewitched by the idea that writers and artists had a large role to play in the struggle to prevent (the approaching war)...Why should there not be a magazine in England round which people who held the same ideas about fascism and war could assemble without having to prove their doctrinaire Marxist purity?...In Left Review the politics came, fatally, first; I wanted a magazine in which literature came first, with the politics only as an undertone." <sup>187</sup>

The 'manifesto' that headed the first number of New Writing and the comments on it he was to write twenty years later are illuminating:

"NEW WRITING is first and foremost interested in literature, and though it does not intend to open its pages to writers of reactionary or fascist sentiments, it is independent of any political party."

"(this) paragraph, I see now, was all too imperfectly expressed, and only indirectly contained my intention, which was to appeal to all those writers to whom, in the catastrophic impasse of the thirties, Keats's famous lines applied:

Those to whom the miseries of the world  
Are misery, and will not let them rest. " <sup>188</sup>

Lehmann was consistently determined to

"maintain a balance against the encroachments of politics into literature" <sup>189</sup>

and observes with satisfaction:

"most critics agreed that New Writing had avoided the crudities of propaganda and justified its claim to be interested in imaginative writing before politics." <sup>190</sup>

Two further features of his project are of especial importance here.

First was his concern that New Writing should in its writers and readers cross national and class frontiers. For a while its provisional title was 'The Bridge'

"as a symbol of the work we wanted it to do in bringing together writers of our own class and writers from the working-class, writers of our own country and writers from abroad." 191

Second was a strong literary preference which he has described as follows:

"I have always had an affection for such spontaneous, untaught writings, when, by a lucky chance, they escape the laboured struggle with what their authors fondly imagine to be correct and cultured diction..." 192

John Lehmann's project, thus principled, led him to an understanding of what it meant to be a working person trying to write and into the roles of editor, counsellor, friend, patron - roles vividly evoked in his own account. 193 From that account it emerges that but for his efforts some important working-class writing might never have been published and still more never written at all. The same may be said of the interventions of other comparable 'second moment' figures, 194

#### Lehmann and Coombes

All of Lehmann's tenets sketched above bear importantly on his relationship with/influence on B L Coombes. The latter

"was active in the political struggle to improve the miner's lot: but what was admirable was the absence of propaganda and deliberate over-painting of suffering and injustice." 195

Therefore he was at home within New Writing: among Lehmann's working-class proteges the "most remarkable" - untutored and producing writing of "simplicity and unforced, quiet movement". He was, like other working-class writers included in the project, 196 one who kept in sharpest focus personal relationships, the human and the contingent - uninclined towards a vision that was simplistic, systematic, schematic. 197

John Lehmann is important to an understanding of the career/develop-

ment of B L Coombes. In the first place all his influence tended to encourage the fictive/literary tendencies noticed above - qualities prerequisite for access to the relatively limited New Writing 'channel'. Second, Lehmann gave Coombes his 'break' (publishing short stories in New Writing). Third, he urged him towards a project whose very success was to exercise a determining influence on his career/development as a writer. This decisive influence is recorded in the dedication to These Poor Hands:

"To John Lehmann (Editor of New Writing) who cheered me by publishing my first short stories and who encouraged me to write this book."

#### 'Determinations'

These Poor Hands is the centrepiece of Coombes's work. It sold  
 198  
 100,000 copies; it gained him fame; it established the fact of him  
 199  
 as 'B L Coombes miner/author'; its appearance opened to him other  
 similar publishing opportunities within "progressive"/Left projects.  
 The signals to an ambitious, able, energetic working-class writer-with-  
 sense-of-urgency were clear and the three books that followed were all  
 broadly within this 'channel' of publication. All three are broadly 'the  
 mixture as before': amalgams of reminiscence, reflection, description,  
 opinion, documentary, reportage - with an imaginative, fictive seam out-  
 cropping here and there. In short, Coombes stuck with a successful  
 formula in responding to the opportunities that came his way: he knew  
 what - if he was to get into the most 'legitimate', prestigious form of  
 200  
 print: book form - was expected of him and he duly 'delivered'. In

his work in this central arena - full-length book publishing - there is on the surface a stronger sense of repetition than of development, though close reading to some degree qualifies such a judgement (see below).

Meanwhile Coombes's short stories, published in New Writing and Coal, display - with one striking 'literary' exception<sup>201</sup> - a tendency for the autobiographical/documentary to invade the fictive as marked as the opposite tendency discussed above. Often the same names crop up, the same incidents are processed (see, for example, p 224 and note 120 above) as in Coombes's non-fiction. Very often the reader would be taxed to know whether s/he was reading a work of literary imagination or non-fictional reportage.<sup>202</sup> In terms of his output, and of their importance in his oeuvre, Coombes's stories are marginal. As regards full-length fiction Coombes's chief 'patron', John Lehmann, appears not at this time to have had publication in his gift. However, had Coombes aspired to become wholly the novelist he partly was, possibilities, as shown above, did exist. Interestingly, among the most prominent of those who took this option, many had enjoyed some substantial post-school formal education (for example, Brierley (Nottingham University); Heslop, Lewis Jones (London Labour College, Kensington); Dattler (Oxford University) - all on miner's scholarships - and Jack Hilton (WEA), and/or were in contact with other writers (Leslie Halward, Walter Brierley and Walter Allen - the 'Birmingham group') and/or had the enforced leisure of unemployment in which to serve a literary 'apprenticeship'. None of this applied to Coombes.

Where biographical information is available about these working-class novelists their novels are very often confirmed as indeed autobiographical (eg Walter Brierley's Means Test Man and Sandwich Man.) Clearly, standard third person fictional narrative was to hand as a familiar cultural form. While sharing this autobiographical tendency, otherwise they fall into two sharply contrasted groups: the explicitly socialist/didactic and the others. In the latter category belong the novels of Walter Brierley,

Roger Dattler and Love on the Dole; in the former, for example, the novels of Harold Heslop and Lewis Jones. While Coombes might conceivably have essayed a Brierley-type novel had he not, perhaps happily, been nudged by John Lehmann towards autobiography and as a result onto quite another trajectory), he was not, as I argue below, 'political' in this explicit sense, though clearly 'political' in subtler senses by virtue of his situation, by what he chose to write about and for whom. This distinction and the implied determinations upon the genres he essayed emerge from contrasting his work with that of his contemporary Welsh miner/writer, Lewis Jones.<sup>203</sup>

#### B L Coombes and Lewis Jones

B L Coombes and Lewis Jones indeed invite comparison. Born in 1893 and 1897 respectively they lived and worked in neighbouring mining valleys and wrote of life there from the early days of the century to the late 1930s (beyond in the case of Coombes).<sup>204</sup> Both sought to express

"the full meaning of life in the Welsh mining areas... for the general reader"<sup>205</sup>

in Jones's case at the specific instigation of Arthur Horner, President of the South Wales Miners' Federation (1936-1947).<sup>206</sup> Both had prodigious energy.<sup>207</sup> Beyond this, however, the similarities are overwhelmed by the contrasts.

Jones, acting on Horner's suggestion that

"the full meaning of life...could be expressed more truthfully and vividly if treated imaginatively, than by any amount of statistical and historical research "

set out to "novelise" ... a phase of working-class history".<sup>208</sup> That

is, in Cwmardy (1937) and We Live (1939) he attempted to use a genre "shaped primarily ...by another and dominant class",<sup>209</sup> one that predominantly had been used to explore the experiences of and relationships

between individuals, in order to portray and analyse collective, local, class experience.<sup>210</sup> The coherence that is sought in naturalistic fiction from the interaction of themes, plot, characterisation, structuring etc as well as from special uses of language, has in Jones's novels to depend on a framework of political ideas and explicit analysis, much of it uttered by Len, Mary, and Len's mentor, Harry Morgan. Jones's partly roman a clef fiction displays a tendency diametrically opposite to what has been noticed in Coombes: fiction aspiring to the condition of documentary. Characters - and very often events - are undeveloped; opportunities to develop characters naturalistically, to develop the dramatic potential of moments of conflict, decision, illumination, volte face - to show rather than tell - are rarely accepted. While Coombes (novelistically) concentrates on particular, individual experience, moving but slowly and tentatively towards analysis and generalisation, Jones, with a clear framework of beliefs, a prior analysis on which coherence will have to depend in the damming of the conventional sources, starts from generalisation and moves towards application to the particular experience of a representative community, if not of realised individuals. David Smith refers to Jones's books as "documentary novels"; Coombes's might be thought of as fictive documentary. However, as we have seen, the two oeuvres by no means meet half-way: the one, Marxist-epical, the other inductive-reformist, could scarcely be more divergent. The applied novel was not an option for Coombes for he had no theory to apply.

#### Working-class novels of the 'second moment'

Cumardy and We Live are the most systematic, political working-class novels of the 'second moment'. Back along the continuum from most to least explicit/didactic are encountered first such novels as Last Cage Down and Gate of a Strange Field (Harold Heslop) and last the work of Walter Greenwood and Walter Brierley. Begun in the 'second moment' (as Andy Croft has shown),<sup>211</sup> and renewed in the 'third', there

has been a lively Left critical debate around the purposes/political effectiveness of these novels. Such a debate, inevitably, takes on questions of the relationships between literature and politics, of what readers make of texts and do or do not do as a result of reading them. Beyond question, the context of the decision to essay the novel form in each case must have been complex. But certainly Jones, responding to Horner's suggestion, was able to exploit a belief, on the part of figures like Douglas Garman at Lawrence and Wishart, in the potential of art - and especially imaginative literature - to forward a distinct political purpose and programme - a tendency alongside others (eg Fact/New Statesman, New Writing, Left Book Club, Left Review) whose operation exercised shaping influence on other working-class writers.

### 'Influences'

Pointers as to why Coombes and others were the kind of writers they were do, then, seem to emerge from the sort of 'sociology of literature' mode of investigations invoked above. A 'weaker' version of 'influence theory' - 'traditional-literary-critical' - might portray not the effect on what Coombes wrote of the predilections of the 'sluicekeepers' of those 'channels' of publication potentially open to him but rather a story of his holding in tension diverse influences (from earlier and contemporary writers and writing). On the one hand it is more than speculative to identify the influence on him of mining documentary-writers like Philip Massey<sup>212</sup> and Montagu Slater<sup>213</sup> - and especially that of Roger Dattall (See Appendix Six) - Coombes's acquaintance with and regard for whose work is documented in his Neath Guardian column.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand apart from the range of influences discussed above and recoverable from the texts themselves, the play of 'literary' influence can be confidently inferred from his dealings with

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John Lehmann. Beyond inference, writing in 1940 Lehmann asserted:

"Coombes has learnt a great deal about words and how to handle them from other writers of the movement, and might indeed never have had the self-confidence and interest to pursue his writings at all if the movement had not been there." 216

Writing to me in 1980 John Lehmann observed:

"I was very keen on his writing, but I must confess that I was disappointed that he became so political."

(This judgement, somewhat puzzling in absolute terms, becomes coherent when situated within the non-fiction/fiction, reportage/'literature', propaganda/art oppositions discussed above).

There are, however, to be laid alongside the foregoing, factors that emerge from other sorts of analysis and that both argue for recognition of the interaction of a variety of determinations and influences and caution against eagerness to embrace monocausal explanations. For example, if we take the dictum of Roland Barthes - je suis écrit - transform it into a question and apply it to Coombes in the form 'Who/what wrote B L Coombes?', we might seek an answer, say, in the oral tradition of working-class culture: blends of telling and showing; dramatic form; deft economical characterisation through snatches of representative dialogue; structures as firm as those associated with writing, though less recoverable to the degree that analysis of speech is less developed - and so on. Again, pursuing the same question we might give weight, unfashionably, to Coombes's own active role (more writing than written!): to see him in his solitary way, about the business of forging new mongrel forms (blends of reportage, autobiography, novel, oral narrative etc) just as there are signs that working-class writers of the 'third moment' are developing new forms to meet their needs. There is a good deal in this: Coombes does emerge as a writer struggling to



reconcile influences, find a voice, develop - like some 'alternative technologist'-forms out of what is to hand: vehicles to carry "the message of the miner round the world"; <sup>217</sup> he allows portrayal as a man who, asked for autobiography/reportage, used and gently subverted the forms to hand and smuggled in items not ordered - like kept poets making the most of occasional commissions.

To return, finally, to a question implied in much of the above: if new forms were under construction why were they not novel forms? An answer to this may apply equally to working-class writers of the 'third' moment who, in circumstances partly different, partly similar, appear also to some extent formally tyrannised by autobiography/reportage. <sup>218</sup> (The interplay between factors such as resources, 'literary-apprenticeship' and self/group-imposed editorial decisions present a more complex picture now than in Coombes's time). One answer to the question 'Why not novels?' is that the move into writing sustained pieces of fiction of 'publishable quality' (against criteria evidently in use at the time - and assuming for the moment that Coombes had no ambition to write schematic socialist teaching in fictional form) might well have involved major creative effort, more time than he had, and a formidably long 'apprenticeship' when he was, as we have seen, in a hurry. (The evidence from the work of the contemporary writer Margaret Powell suggests she found the same move - from reminiscence to fiction - equally problematic. However, in her case she had the resources and leisure to retrain for a career in fiction once her seam of reminiscence was worked out). <sup>219</sup>

Once again, Bernard Sharratt - in discussing Samuel Bamford's Passages in the Life of a Radical - has a passage that in virtually every respect applies equally and elaborately to Coombes's predicament:

"Bamford does not transmute his experience fully into fiction, into a novel, where the relationship to his material would have required a different kind of skill or capacity: an imaginative creation of, and inwardness to, 'other' characters, a breaking beyond the bounds of his own actual experiences, a distancing from self. To some extent, perhaps, his meagre education provided some of the limits in that direction...the limits of his self-expression are deeply connected with his inability to enter fully into mediated relationship with his experience and his audience...to read a novel is to enter another community, to penetrate others' experiences, to leave the horizon of one's own 'world'; in the process, one's horizon is opened, one's community re-defined, one's experience reflected back and refracted, prepared for judgement. To write a novel seems to require the same kinds of openness." 220

Clearly the factors influencing Coombes's development as a writer are complex and interacting. Among these none seem more decisive than his ambition to get into print (especially into books) and his urgency of purpose. The latter would tend to work against any idea of adopting oblique, 'alchemical', 'literary' means (such as those of, say, Zola and Dickens) to portray social, industrial, economic and political ills. Exposing, as a first move towards remedying those ills brooked no postponement while the writer submitted himself to a perhaps lengthy 'apprenticeship' in the craft of fiction - always assuming such fictive indirection were considered to the purpose. His sense of urgency was apparently widely shared before and during World War II - and especially by John Lehmann at the decisive moment in Coombes's writing career, perhaps in his life.

#### B L Coombes: 'insider/outsider'

In this final section I attempt to evaluate Coombes's experience, broadly to characterise him as a miner/writer, and in doing so suggest what might be carried forward from this chapter to the analysis of developments in the 'third moment of working-class writing'.

~ The work and experience of Coombes is full of ambivalences and tensions: shot through with contradictions. This can be briefly exemplified by employing again the distinction between 'matter'

and 'manner' invoked above - by relating both to his highly unusual situation.

As regards matter it is evident, first, that Coombes simultaneously claims and resists identification with miners en masse. The details of his identification (for example with harsh conditions and exploitation, with union activity and with some aspects of mining community culture) have been explored above. However, his rejections are equally forthright. They are evident in what he denounces (especially a 'debased' popular culture, figured again and again, as mentioned above, in contemptuous references to Pearl White<sup>221</sup> and those who have nothing better to do than gawp at her) and in certain sorts of drinking and drinking environments.<sup>222</sup>

Coombes's rejections are also eloquent in the silences, 'there' in the absences from his work:

"The collective spirituality of South Wales as expressed in the choirs, the brass-bands, the banners and the marches, even the exquisite satisfaction of its rugby, does not have his attention..."<sup>223</sup>

One might add to that list chapel, fishing, the breeding and racing of whippets and pigeons and, but for very few references, pub and club life. Coombes's attitudes, beliefs, values are, of course, present - implicitly and explicitly - everywhere in his work and include a reverence and respect for education - and for that 'high culture' he saw as identified with it<sup>224</sup> and a regard for a proper, constructive use of leisure.

In all this Coombes figures an ideal-type of 'elite' worker<sup>225</sup> - union man, keen on education, 'cultured', steeped in serious literature (including the literature of the Left) - a figure historically obstructing the recognition of working-class culture as complete and legitimate

in its own terms, and for whom, historically, separation (physical, cultural and political) from working-people en masse has typically been the destiny. 226

Next, while Coombes was energetic within, an important apologist for, much developed by and ~~staunchly~~ committed to trade union activity - i.e. to principles of collectivity and community - he was, perhaps at heart, a rugged, self-help individualist - as is exemplified by his advocacy of and a life-style that combined, mining and small-holding, with the physical and perhaps psychological dispersal of community this entailed.

Much of the foregoing is also expressed in the manner of Coombes's work. His insider/outsider predicament - which gained an added dimension in his being both a lifelong South Wales miner and yet originally an Englishman 'from away' - is implicit in author stance, tone, style and sense of audience. Examples suggest his simultaneous roles as participant and spectator, and the predominance of the latter.

Coombes is typically in the role of onlooker; watching, a step or two away. Examples of his anthropologist stance, anatomising his colleagues' behaviour, abound; and this tendency, as I suggest below, is bound up with his shifting sense of audience. His sense of being apart - with but not fully of the community of mining colleagues - emerges vividly from his rendering of dialogue. While the speech of others is rendered in 'non-Standard dialect', his own contributions, in all but one or two remarks throughout the entire oeuvre, are in 'Standard'. Furthermore, 'non-Standard', as is apparent from his deployment of it, occupies for him the same place and carries the same significance - somewhat quaint, potentially comic, perhaps signalling earthy peasant honesty, wisdom, sturdiness, but unquestionably deviant from the kind of language in which serious and elevated discourses are conducted -

as it clearly still does today for all but a minority who have put effort into disentangling linguistic from social judgements about language. There is more than a hint of condescension about his portrayal of his colleagues and their viewpoints. As with Roger Dattler and H J Parry Jones there is a sense, implicit in style and informing tone of voice,<sup>227</sup> that he is removed from and even a cut above his colleagues, for whom he aspires to stand as literate representative.<sup>228</sup>

The key to all this is his sense of audience - which is examinable both within the texts and in a few, rare, explicit 'meta-statements' about his writer-role.

It is clear that, within a tradition of reporting to the middle-class, the audience he addresses in his four books is an educated, predominantly middle-class, predictably Left or 'progressive' readership: a miner 'insider' addressing 'outsiders'. Some of this is made explicit,<sup>229</sup> for example, in his Introduction to Those Clouded Hills. In this role he sometimes stands shoulder to shoulder with colleagues facing out, and sometimes turns to face in, inviting outsiders to stand with him, confident they will share his humane political values, cultural assumptions etc. In writing for Coal, in contrast, he is self-evidently addressing insiders, sometimes in the role of popular educator. In at least one place this leads him apparently to conceive of an audience split as between older miners, who share with him certain values and traditions, and younger men whose behaviour gives cause for concern<sup>230</sup> and to adopt a sermonising tone:

"We must admit that a section of our workers, not the largest section by any count, are not helping to create a good opinion. I have wondered what mistake in upbringing and environment has been responsible for this warped outlook..."<sup>231</sup>

There are perhaps two other audiences: the vast, unknown radio audience<sup>232</sup> discussed above in relation to Hodge - and a microcosm of that -

although obviously skewed regionally - the readership of the Neath Guardian. Interestingly Coombes slips now and again in addressing that readership into assuming that, because local, it will not need to have specialist mining terms explained.

The uncertainties of Coombes's position - as simultaneously and in various senses insider and outsider - may be best located in his highly unusual status as both coal-miner and habitual, prolific and successful writer. What emerges from a brief probing of this status carries forward most readily into later discussions in this study.

In The Road to Wigan Pier George Orwell wrote:

"More than anyone else, perhaps, the miner can stand as the type of the manual worker, not only because his work is so exaggeratedly awful, but also because it is so vitally necessary and yet so remote from our experience, so invisible, as it were, that we are capable of forgetting it as we forget the blood in our veins." 233

In the comparatively small world of working-class writing, and the related world of industrial song, miner/writers are prominent in terms of their numbers and the general forcefulness of their work. In the problems they have to negotiate - physical, economic, social, literary and so on - miner/writers evince a convincing type of the working-class writer. The work and experience of B L Coombes illustrates and evokes these problems and their processes of negotiation - matters important to the present study as a whole.

In a passage that recalls Herbert Hodge's accounts of the physical/economic/social difficulties that faced him, which will find echoes in accounts (below) of the experience of working-class writers of the 'third moment' and which was written with Coombes among others in mind, John Lehmann evokes the obstacles and realities that faced the many working-class writers he knew, and in doing so fills out somewhat the account of his own 'enabling' role sketched above:

"...they at all events could not afford to devote more time to learning their craft as writers than a few hours after work in the evenings. Sometimes the writer was on the dole: this provided more time all right, but made the purchase of even such minor instruments of the trade as notebooks and pens an almost impossible extravagance. I tried to devise all kinds of stratagems to get round the difficulties when I believed that the writer really had 'got something'; but I had not the means at my disposal to do more than occasionally produce a tiny allowance, as advance on a remotely envisaged fee, for a limited number of weeks. One wrote to me... that on twenty five shillings a week he could only produce a twenty-five shilling job, and he knew it wasn't good enough; and that anyway he could not go on doing all the 'taking' without any 'giving' in return. Another told me that not only did he have five small boys of his own, but that next door there was a family of eight children, and above him a family of nine; and that ~~through~~ through the ceiling and the walls he could hear not only the normal noises of boisterous tenement children, but also roller-skates, marbles, coal-breaking, firewood-chopping, the roar of the lavatories being flushed, and worst of all the piano being played out of tune. If he tried to write during the few blessed hours - being out of work - when most of the children were at school, there was a constant stream of callers, canvassers, pedlars, hawkers, rag-and-bone men, coalmen, buyers of old gold, and equally unemployed neighbours coming to pass the time of day; if he told them he was trying to write, he would merely become an object of special curiosity, and they would come all the more...one young author, a dockyard apprentice, described to me his struggle to find an evening or two a week for writing against the claims of political study-circles and organizing the Labour League of Youth, door-to-door collections for 'Arms for Spain', making speeches at the Co-operative Guild and running a stall at the Labour Party Christmas Fair. It was not a good programme for an intending author; but he had endless courage and energy to obscure for many years the impossibility of running three careers at the same time." (My emphasis) <sup>234</sup>

The passage from which this is extracted affords a rare account of some of the difficulties faced by working-class writers in all periods, besides suggesting a good deal about the nature of Lehmann's 'interventions', assumptions, attitudes - about what he refers to as the two 'sides' (middle- and working-class writers), about what it meant to be a writer, and so on. Other glimpses are afforded by George Orwell

"I urged (George Garrett) to write his autobiography but, living in two rooms with a number of kids he finds it impossible to settle to any long work and can only do short stories " <sup>235</sup> -

and by Jack Common:

"Dear Jack...I've done three pages, and I've got nowt more to say. It cost two pints of mild and bitter, 1s 1d; one small Players, 6d. Total 1s 7d. How much will 8,000 words work out at?"

"...I got 3,000 words done, Jack, but it can't be helped, you know the way we live in this bloody tenement, while I was out the baby got hold of the sheets and messed 'em up, so you'll have to count me out." 236

B L Coombes within his four books touches here and there on the physical facts of his predicament as a writer. In the final chapter of These Poor Hands, preparing for the night shift and in mellow mood, he mentions the noise from the pub next door. On the evidence of his son it was - not surprisingly - a different story when he was trying to write:

"The family lived then in Resolven, in a tiny cottage next to a pub whose noise drove Bert Coombes to frenzy in the book-filled front bedroom where he worked." 237

In Those Clouded Hills we come across the odd 'snapshot' of himself at his writing - after the move out of Resolven:

"A thumb mark on this page has reminded me of the conditions in which this is written. I am in a large shed, fairly warm and comfortable, on a high point above the mining valley. The windows were not made to open, nor must the door be left ajar, because the place will be filled with dust floating from the colliery stacks which surrounds us about half a mile away in either direction. Every morning I wipe the dust coating from the papers " 238

and

"I have just had an interruption - they occur fairly often but this one comes so close to our problems of absenteeism 239 and compensation that I will include him in this account."

This reflexivity, this writing about writing, is part of a growing confidence (that he will be of interest to readers as himself and not merely as a representative type) and growing sophistication (realising that such thumbnail sketches contribute something to what he is trying to evoke). There is also a dash of pride - he is writing against all



odds - and perhaps the anticipation (founded on the responses of his new middle-class literary associates) that he will be seen as in the circumstances remarkable, even heroic. In the second example quoted above one suspects some guile and literary patterning of the kind explored earlier.

The social problems Coombes encountered as part of being a writer, though scarcely documented are hinted at here and there. Within Coombes's work we come across the occasional revealing aside. In a passage protesting against the widespread undervaluing of manual work and workers we read:

"My first instruction in mining was given by a school-teacher and I have ever since wondered why a man with a flabby body and soft hands should have been chosen to show me how to do hard work...there is a danger that the boy will absorb the manner of dress and living of the one who teaches him - and often that means another boy lost to mining.../It is a foundation industry right at the heart of creation and the rock bottom on which our national wealth is founded. It needs great skill and tests the energy of real men. In exactly similar state is the farming industry and what fool standards are these which place a third-class clerk as of more value than a skilled miner or farm labourer?" (My emphasis) <sup>241</sup>

Arguably the distinction between "real men" and others evokes Coombes's ambivalent attitude as simultaneously both miner and writer. His own life-style - a balance of punishing physical work in mine and small-holding and long hours on top of that of a different but equally taxing sort of toil - represents a way of life full of tensions and conflicts. In this passage virility is reasserted, colleagues are reassured that their work is to be recognised as harsh and heroic; and middle class readers (the primary readership) ruled 'offside': in no position to challenge the judgement and defend their status as "real men". Coombes is not alone among working-class writers in having had to contend with

additional problems arising from class cultural attitudes ranging from suspicion ('class spies') to contempt and perhaps hostility. Some of this is readily extrapolated from Walter Brierley's Sandwich Man, and perhaps from this coal-face exchange in Harold Heslop's Last Cage Down:

"'I've read about them in Jack London...'  
 'And who the hell's Jack London?'  
 'You don't know Jack London!'  
 'I wouldn't ask if I knew. What's he done.' Is he a fighter?'  
 'A writer, Bill?'  
 'A writer! I see. A blatherskite!'"<sup>242</sup>

In 1936 Belgian coal-miner Constant Malva published Un propr' a rien (A Good-for-Nothing): about a trainee miner whose

"colleagues fled from him because he was too well read."

(Ragon, 1974, 263-264)

In 1941 Coombes took the opportunity, as Hodge had in 1939, of writing about the role and circumstances of "working-class writers". The previous year Virginia Woolf had read to Brighton W E A a paper, 'The Leaning Tower', that among other things discussed the circumstances, roles and 'making' of aspiring writers - including the opinion that

"it is death for a writer...to be forced to earn his living in a mine or a factory."<sup>243</sup>

Coombes's responses, 'Below the Tower', was one of four published (the others by Edward Upward, Louis MacNeice and John Lehmann). In many senses it confirms what can be recovered from elsewhere in his work about his attitudes towards, and problems in respect of the issues under discussion. In what follows, in considering Coombes's views

on the role and making of working-class writers as well as his own development, I draw extensively on this essay - for two reasons. First it deserves attention as a second rare example of a working-class writer theorising about practice; second, it makes explicit what is implicit throughout his work concerning his intentions, sense of his readership, view of his situation and both the difficulties and profound educative effect on him of becoming an habitual writer.

How Coombes saw the role of the working-class writer is made explicit in the following 3 step argument:

- (1) "The leaders in thought have...begun to realise how great the gap is that exists between themselves and the lives, the thoughts, and the ideas of the mass of people; and also how greatly their future may depend on the way that mass of people feels and behaves"
- (2) "...if Virginia Woolf (or a visiting journalist) should visit this mining area in which I live" (she would, while being shown hospitality, meet) "attitudes of suspicion... amongst (a) class of people (who) know they have good cause to be wary"
- (3) "if we are to survive, we must bridge this gap and the solution that appeals most to me is the worker who is also a writer. He is almost the only one who can connect both sides and I feel he should be encouraged because, for good or evil, he is going to play a most important role in the future of our lives and our literature." 244

This confirms as target readership predominantly middle-class 'outsiders'

as assuredly as elsewhere his name-dropping references to Gogol and Dos

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Passos and, in fact, the general demeanour of the great bulk of his work.

On the matter of whether a writer (on whose broad characterisation he appears to share consensus with Virginia Woolf ) can afford to remain in "a mine or a factory" Coombes writes as follows:

"I feel we have some advantages because the material for our shaping is very close to our hands...we do add very greatly to our capital by living amongst the people of our kind, trying to

let the world know how they live. Here I feel that worker writers have their one great advantage - they are in the ant-heap and do not view it from a distance...It may be death for a middle-class writer to work in a mine or factory - in a writing sense, of course - because it would mean conditions that repel him and a way of living and working that would upset all his ideas. It is just as surely the creative end of a working class writer if he leaves his own sphere; he has grown into it and the labour is part of his being." 246

A third, major point Coombes takes up is Virginia Woolf's 'curriculum' for the would-be writer - a topic of special interest to the present study. He starts by describing the difficulties to be overcome and writes:

"working class writing has not yet become strong on its feet and for the most part is still like an alarmed infant, whimpering at finding itself in strange company and fearing that it may be cuffed before being sent back to its home...It is also true that a great proportion of the working class have no facility in either reading or writing, as yet...conceive the terrific struggle a man of the working class must put up before he can 'get through' as a writer. It seems that every door is shut against him, that he has set himself a most hopeless task, and that writing must be in every pulse of his being if he can survive and express himself at last...we are crude and clumsy because our life has made us so, and having no guide we grope into the darkness - often taking the wrong road." 247

Moving on to discuss the way forward Coombes suggests

"One must learn to select, to create character that convinces, and to use every book or article that helps our craft...There are months of study to be faced; continual practice in the use of words to be maintained; and every day the lack of privacy or quiet, and the exhaustion of heavy work - work for the pay envelope - must be borne. I put it fairly, so I think, if I claim that such a man would be lucky if he had any degree of recognition as a writer under five or ten years. I am writing from experience, knowing I have been unusually lucky." 248

Finally, moving from this essay and reflecting on Coombes's work and experience as a whole, there is the matter of Coombes's development as a writer and what that both demonstrates about and contributed to his education and development generally.

His growth as a writer is visible in his growing confidence,

signalled ~~intone~~ of voice and increasingly bold structural decisions. He clearly learned much from writing These Poor Hands with its "loose, baggy" <sup>249</sup> overall structure, its flexible form and the opportunity to experiment it afforded - also from working within the constraints of time, space and format of a Fact number ('I am a Miner'). In Those Clouded Hills (published in 1944 by the Cobbett Publishing Company) he moved farthest towards the impersonal and discursive modes, though the poetic, the lyrical and the personal continue to outcrop from time to time, especially in the Introduction (perhaps indebted to George Orwell for the ruling idea of the sheer 'invisibility' of miners) and early on. It was here, in addition, that Coombes brought general industrial, economic and political issues into sharpest focus. There is an almost total absence of dialogue and virtually none of the snatches of speech that he uses so effectively elsewhere.

In some ways the most satisfactory synthesis of those elements of his work already discussed - autobiographical, personal, fictive, impersonal, discursive etc - is achieved in the often lyrical, celebratory Miners Day. This, a Penguin Special, addressed potentially his widest, least-knowable audience (along with his Picture Post journalism and radio talks). Here dialogue is back - and humour. There is a sort of unity of time: secured both by evoking a pattern of successive shifts (night-shifts begin and end the book) and by explicitness about the actual period of time (March 1944 onwards) which the book covers - with its references to conversations about the Porter Award, debates around the Education Bill, Bevin Boys, moves to expel Aneurin Bevan from the Labour Party, as well as seasonal evolution, rhododendrons in flower and so on - and during which, somewhat diary-like, it was written. There is an elegant shape with, arguably as climax, the miners' Whit Monday march a full-dress set piece: typically the account of observer

rather than participant, characteristically full of "they" rather than "we" - and with at least a suspicion of Dylan-itis about the use of language.<sup>250</sup>

### Neath Guardian

If Coombes's development as a writer is clear in the trajectory of the four books it is nowhere more evident than in the 30 years' output of Neath Guardian pieces. Even by 1963 Coombes had contributed over 12,000 articles (some 10,600,000 words)<sup>251</sup> to the Neath Guardian: week in, week out, surrounded by items such as the Taibach Charity Youth Club Mr Knobbly Knees Competition, "Averavon Man sold Ungraded Eggs", "Gave Way to Temptation: Port Talbot Widow's False Statement", by ads for the improbable "Soako: Does all Your Wash by Soaking Alone, 3½d & 6d packets" - and by other contributions from such as The Bishop of St David's, Councillor Clifford Protheroe, J P, "Augur" (World Copyright Reserved), The Rt Hon J R Clynes, "Gleaner" and "Mr Sensible". He doubles as both 'plain man' and 'popular educator'. In the former role he crusades for humanitarian causes, decency and compassion; inveighs against prejudice and injustice; discusses sex and violence on television (against both);<sup>252</sup> worries about what he sees as a widening gap between the leaders and rank and file of the Labour Party;<sup>253</sup> develops a faintly ironic blend of 'country notes' and commentary on the unfolding life of the mining community;<sup>254</sup> campaigns gently for larger slits in outlying pillar boxes<sup>255</sup> (the special pleading of the rural writer with deadlines to meet?) As 'popular educator' he argues positions on industrial, social, economic, political questions and, most typically, 'notices' and recommends a formidable number of 'improving' books, taking into account price, portability and his readers' circumstances. In both matter and manner there are discernible trajectories of development. In the former respect he starts (1940) from concentration on the familiar and the local (chiefly mining, farming and community matters) and gradually brings more and more remote issues into his purview (a sort of "disembedding").<sup>256</sup>

As regards manner there are a number of developmental moves: perhaps<sup>257</sup> chief among them the shift from loose collections of unrelated items, strongly "classified and framed" (!), to, typically - and more and more formulaically - fewer items treated more fully, their mutual relevance signalled by a unifying theme made explicit, often near the end of the piece. At his most confident and polished he establishes thematic unity without insistence, without heavy underlining. His confidence is also signalled by the distinct impression given that he is playing himself in for a long innings - bidding to institutionalize his column - for example through instating its own type-character, "Wattie". (Cp Benjy, above, and Peter Simple's gallery of grotesques in The Daily Telegraph). As his craftsmanship develops there is a more various interplay between particular and general, local and national and between different levels of reality. On 6 April, 1962, reporting on the television showing of "Route 66" he remarks that the film

"showed the defeat of a group of councillors who tried to do what some Neath Rural and Borough officials seem determined to do to the Dylais Valley."

Near the end of his long innings the column halved to 500 words. An old hand, he had learned, like Alastair Cooke, how to milk an anecdote so as to fill the time/space available. "Narrative old age"<sup>258</sup> was upon him and at least "every third thought"<sup>259</sup> was reminiscent.

Coombes's personal development - his increasing sophistication, breadth of understanding and reference, his roundedness - is implicit in the development of his writing. While what fuelled that development is ultimately unknowable one may with some confidence identify two formative influences.

First in his union and in relevant respects similar activity (eg St John's Ambulance).<sup>260</sup> Chapter Five of Those Clouded Hills offers

the fullest account; and what emerges from this portrayal of structured and purposeful activity - listening, talking, reading, writing; exercising judgement, sensitivity and compassion over cases and colleagues; travelling to and operating effectively within conferences of 'strangers'; <sup>261</sup> dealing with men socially and educationally superior <sup>262</sup> - what emerges from his account of all this is the profoundly educative force of such experience.

In addition to this - ie education through participation in a democratic, collective, public enterprise - the second educative influence was his writing activity in all its aspects. On the periphery of this was, perhaps, his enriching contact with, for example, John Lehmann, BBC producers, film people, Neath Guardian colleagues and so on. Closer to the centre is the reading that his work - especially his Neath Guardian column - involved and the incremental effect of this on an already vigorous reading habit. At the heart of the educative process was Coombes at his coal-dusty writing table: struggling with 'macro' problems of overall structure and 'micro' problems of particular sentences and the ever-shifting interplay between the two; trying to find an appropriate form for each particular experience; reconciling an amplitude of experience with the strict page-limit of a Fact edition or word-limit of his weekly column; meeting deadlines when weary from pit and field.

Most eloquently of all, perhaps, the educative force of the experience of "learning how to mean" <sup>263</sup> is figured 'transcendentally' in the passion - precisely a passion to learn - voiced in the peroration of his essay 'Below the Tower':

"I am an adventurer in literature, but my step is getting firm and my hand is quite strong...I feel that we on our side have a great need for the Leaning Tower" (established, privileged)" writers if they will come a little nearer. I know they can teach me much that is necessary and good. I would like to learn from them...I want those from the Leaning Tower to come down and teach me what I lack."



## Five

A second 'moment' of working-class writing

### Overview

In 1925 T J Parry Jones published The Other Story of Coal:

A working miner's attempt to state the miner's point of view on the coal question. In his preamble he remarks:

"In presenting this volume may I respectfully ask readers to bear in mind it is a compilation of a working miner who has worked in the mines at various grades from the age of twelve to the present time, which covers a period of thirty-one years...The views expressed are not necessarily the writer's own. At all times every effort has been made to place the views of 'Jack Jones' the miner to the forefront. Much has been written on mining matters from time to time, but nothing has been published, so far as the writer's knowledge goes, of how the average miner himself looks at matters.

What the working miner wants is a Dickens. To give a real vivid description of mining conditions, which would arouse the interest of the public's mind to its very depths, a genius is required. There is plenty of scope and abundance of material. One hears occasionally of distinguished men donning the moleskin of the navvy so as to enable them to have a closer insight into particular phases of life with which they were not previously conversant. Others have faced the rigorous life of a deck-hand on a tramp steamer, so as to give them the literary material needed. Anyone desirous of entering on an adventurous proposition of that kind would be welcomed in mining realms, one who would be prepared to give a fair and an independent portrayal...The placing of the workers' viewpoint, should devolve particularly on those who take an active interest in industrial matters at their respective lodges." 1  
(My emphasis)

The distinctions here are interesting. First, as a miner reflecting on mining matters Parry Jones sees himself as probably scoring a 'first' (significantly, a far from uncommon situation in the history of working-class writing).

Second, he is at pains to offer an account that is representative of miners en masse rather than merely his own. Third, he accepts a clear division of labour: union men to represent the miners' viewpoint; "a Dickens" to portray "mining conditions".

Twenty years on, as the military and political settlements of 1945 took shape, there closed a period which had seen a remarkable flowering of working-class writing ranging far beyond the coalfields - indeed world-wide, if one considers the extent of the writing and publishing by servicemen in World War II, which is only now beginning to be properly understood - and ranging, in what worker-writers essayed, far beyond

Parry Jones's 1925 imagining.

The above case-studies of Herbert Hodge and B L Coombes, in identifying interacting political/literary/publishing trends - the slump-quickenened political interest in working-class life and conditions, the linked initiatives of certain key figures, the role of patrons and the conditions of patronage - go some way to suggesting answers to the question 'Why then?'. Within the 'second moment' the climax as regards quantity of published working-class writing was, probably, 1937-1939.<sup>2</sup> Hodge's high point was, roughly 1936-1944: Coombes's 1939-1945. The wave broke in 1945. The Labour election 'landslide' and the post-war political settlement, in part prepared for by books like These Poor Hands and Love on the Dole, heralded a withdrawal of interest, a shift of fashion. Things were never the same again.<sup>3</sup>

Further, these studies, in what they draw in (including in notes and related appendices) in exploring the work and experiences of contemporaneous working-class writers and others working within the same projects, help provide a basis for characterising what is unique about developments in the 'third moment' (1971-1981): how, in respect of the work and experience of working-class writers, now compares with then. The characteristics of then emerge from both the individual case-studies and from comparisons between Hodge and Coombes.

In obvious yet interesting respects they differ: for example, Hodge reports on an eccentric succession of jobs and, centrally, work within a small, fragmented trade; Coombes from within a single, mass industry. (Ken Worpole<sup>4</sup> has taken Walter Benjamin's distinction between two archetypal kinds of storyteller - the peasant rooted in his community and the voyager - and made use of it in relation to 1930s working-class writers. In these terms Coombes is located at the 'peasant' end of this continuum, Hodge perhaps somewhere in the middle and, say, George Garrett (eg 'Fishmeal') at the other end.)

An important contrast can be made in respect of their processes of development as writers. Hodge wanted to take full, independent responsibility:

"The only thing wrong with our sounds is that they haven't yet got a literary form. It's our job to make one...the uneducated writer is working deep down at the roots among the talk-stuff./ It's his job to take hold of his native idiom, and to wrestle with it until he's found a way of making it convey his meanings accurately on paper" <sup>5</sup>

while Coombes looked up for guidance:

"I want those from the Leaning Tower to come down and teach me what I lack." <sup>6</sup>

These contrasting approaches can be related to the two broad traditions of working-class education ('independent'/'self-help' and 'dependent'/'provided') discussed below.

With regard to formal educational background, both were substantially auto-didacts: there is no record of formal adult educational experience. In this they differ from, say, Walter Brierley, Roger Dattler, Harold Maslop, Jack Hilton and Louis Jones - the difference extending to their not, unlike these others, having essayed the novel form. <sup>7</sup>

Hodge and Coombes were also alike in the relative isolation from work colleagues (more so in the case of Coombes) that writing entailed. Although Middleton Murry (through the Adelphi) and John Lehmann attempted to put working-class writers in touch with each other; although Jim Phelan and George Garrett among the 1930s Liverpool writers knew each other; although the interaction between Walter Allen, Walter Brierley and John Hampson led to their coming to be known as the 'Birmingham Group', nevertheless isolation was the general case. It arose partly from feelings of difference on the part of writers -

"...there are occasions when M and I seem absolutely isolated, walking, the only substantial beings, in a world of dim dream shadows with whom we can never really come into contact try as often as we may " <sup>8</sup>

partly from working-class attitudes to writing itself:

"My brothers, who are in the clothing trade, unfortunately still have to do a great deal of work from time to time. But they claim, proudly, that I, who am a 'writer', have brought the family tradition of loafing to its logical conclusion." 9

Finally, what emerges from close attention to the work and experience of Hodge and Coombes and the contexts in which they worked is, as has been argued, an impressive sense of the sheer importance of writing (and related activity) to their personal development. It is as though they were taking a one-way correspondence course, with revered authors as 'masters' and contact with more literate people performing an occasional 'summer-school' booster. While the influence of the living and the dead, the present and the absent were obviously of variable value, certainly exclusion from relevant discourses and the dearth of supportive, critical 'feedback' must count as disadvantages to these working-class writers.

Much that has emerged, both about the 'second moment' and the work and experience of Hodge, Coombes and others, parallels and contrasts contemporaneous developments in France. A brief consideration of these provides a bridge into the study of developments in the 'third moment', the subject of the next part of the study.

"A new literature is in the making, one that will voice the new culture. This will be the literature of the worker as opposed to that of the fighter or the master." 10

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In Histoire de la Littérature Proletarienne en France Michel

Ragon writes of the crucial role of the Ecole Proletarienne between 1920-1939:

"There were few worker-writers between the wars who remained untouched by it and who did not owe their self-expression to it. It contributed in restoring to worker expression its vitality - evident between 1830 and 1848 and not seen again since." 12

Ragon singles out a period that matches fairly closely the 'second moment' here:

"Nowadays, with magazines so few and worker writers scarcely

getting the chance to express themselves, the abundance of proletarian publications in the period 1930 to 1938 is all the more astonishing." (My emphasis). <sup>13</sup>

Ragon identifies a 'moment' characterised by a 'vitality and fecundity of popular expression' <sup>14</sup> and discusses writing workers in such jobs as factory worker, miner, farm worker and shoemaker, as well as labourer, foundry worker, cook, post clerk, telephonist, typist, hairdresser, cooper, gas worker. <sup>15</sup>

In some respects developments in France resemble those in this country. There was, for example, the encouragement, patronage and influence-with-publishers of middle-class Left writers and intellectuals: such as Marcel Martinet (who wrote for L'Humanité and had encouraged factory worker Lucien Bourgeois (sic) to write his autobiography, L'Ascension); <sup>16</sup> Henri Barbusse (who wrote a preface for Bourgeois's second book, Faubourgs, and with whom John Lehmann was in touch); <sup>17</sup> Jean Tousseul, who encouraged miner Constant Malva; and Romain Rolland. As was often the case here (for example, the relationship between George Orwell and Jack Hilton) <sup>18</sup> these partnerships of unequals were far from satisfactory:

"This 'rapprochement' between the working-class and the intellectuals in the inter-war period was a fool's paradise." <sup>19</sup>

There were broad equivalents to New Writing, Fact, Left Review, Adelphi, etc: Les Primaires, Proletariat, Commune and L'Humanité (under sympathetic literary editorship from 1930, certainly). As here there was a spectrum of approaches and political opinions. There were attempts to distinguish 'proletarian writers' from 'autodidactes' ('anciens prolétariens'), and both from populists, on the one hand, and propagandists on the other. <sup>20</sup> As with Left Review

there was some belief in the role of literature in creating a Left, proletarian culture and lively debate about the problems inherent in bourgeois literary forms. In debates about literature and society, literature and socialism, literature and propaganda, writers' roles and workers' roles, the same Left dilemmas surfaced in respect of literature and culture (illustrated here in the hostile reception given by the Daily Worker to Love on the Dole and Means Test Man). <sup>21</sup>

Finally, and of especial importance, there was one strand of developments in France for which there seems to have been no clear parallel here and which interestingly anticipates some recent developments in this country.

The central figure of working-class writing in France in the 'second moment' was Henri Poulaille: bottle washer, labourer, paper seller, factory worker - writer. Together with railwayman Tristan Rémy, Poulaille set out to find other worker writers, encourage the formation of groups, establish and maintain contacts. Through this work they met factory worker Lucien Bourgeois and through him Marcel Martinet at L'Humanité.  
Martinet

"urged the setting up of worker study groups and asked that first and foremost the worker be taught his trade, that his general culture arise from foundations of technical knowledge and never be dissociated from trade unionism." <sup>22</sup>

Martinet also urged, as Albert Thierry had done, that proletarian <sup>23</sup> writers should refuse to 'parvenir' (change class).

Poulaille and Lucien Bourgeois were the founding fathers of the École Proletarienne; Poulaille's major achievement was perhaps the founding (in 1930) and editing of Nouvel Age, a "revue" where working-class texts might be published.

These points of difference - the moves in France on the part of working-class writers to group themselves for self-help and to publish as well as be published (heralding tendencies here in the

'third moment') - are the most significant to emerge from this brief trawl into developments in France and mark an appropriate point of entry to the final stage of the study.



## PART III

## A THIRD 'MOMENT' OF WORKING-CLASS WRITING

## Six

Community Publishing:  
context, processes, aims

1

Since 1971 there has been a mushrooming growth of 'community publishing'. Around the country 'community groups,' 'writers' workshops', 'people's history groups' and so on have sprung up to stimulate and publish, as part of their purposes, the work of local and predominantly working-class people. There are now around thirty independent working-class writers' groups and publishing initiatives loosely linked within the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP); beyond it are many more, small-scale, grass-roots publishing ventures, often remaining unknown to it and to each other. Groups within the FWWCP have some 200 titles currently in print; sales across the board are estimated to have exceeded one million.

The projects referred to, in their origins, orientations and processes, display considerable variety.

#### Origins

3

Some groups arose from WEA classes; others from adult literacy projects;<sup>4</sup> yet others from initiatives to provide bookshops for huge urban and chiefly working-class populations hitherto lacking them.<sup>5</sup> Some publishing initiatives grew out of community action. For example, QueenSpark (Brighton) came into being as a "campaign to stop Brighton Council turning...The Royal Spa into a casino, and to get a nursery school day nursery and park centre instead:"<sup>6</sup> moves to resist the proposed changes (how things are) turned people's attention to the past (how things were) and led to the taping, writing and publication of reminiscences in a feature, 'Sparchives' in a campaign newspaper). The curiosity of newcomers to the area as to its past fuelled this tendency.<sup>7</sup> Scotland Road (Liverpool) - the oldest workshop<sup>8</sup> - grew (in circumstances both resembling and differing from those of QueenSpark)

out of a tenants' campaign and rent strike whose effectiveness depended on the ability of working-class residents to start to write and 'publish' letters, handbills, newsletters etc.

In contrast, other groups have moved in the opposite direction: from an initial local working-class history impetus towards community action. For example, the trajectory of East Bowling (Bradford) History Workshop has been from a starting point of reflecting on the past to a sharpened perception of objectionable developments in the present. This has led to the foundation of a community newspaper and to this theme beginning to play an organising, focusing role in the entire project.<sup>9</sup> Such examples illustrate the need to understand the contexts and complexities of 'community publishing' activity: the relationship of writing and publishing to community action. They also caution against the reading of texts without reference to their contexts of production, distribution and use, and of the over-hasty dismissal of reminiscence as nostalgia, 'false consciousness' etc.

### Convergent Development: History Workshop

The development of History Workshop (event and publication) has been important to that of many of the groups under discussion. It has been inspirational to many initiatives; the two enterprises - in some senses convergent trends - are by now considerably intertwined<sup>10</sup> (though the relationship is not without tension).<sup>11</sup>

History Workshop, which began in 1966 at Ruskin College, Oxford, was, as Raphael Samuel has written,

"...an attempt to create...an alternative educational practice, to encourage Ruskin students... to engage in research, and to construct their own history...It was our argument that adult students, so far from being educationally underprivileged - the working definition adopted by the college authorities - were peculiarly well-placed to write about many facets of industrial and working-class history." <sup>12</sup>

(Interestingly, and see below the discussion of oral history issues, Raphael Samuel goes on to identify, as among the early influences, the "micro sociology popularised in the middle 1960s by the early deviancy theorists" and within social and cultural anthropology "its method of participant observation - its local and familial focus and its attempts to give a theoretical and cultural dimension to the transactions of everyday life.") <sup>13</sup>

For some years now History Workshop has been a 'rolling' annual event and has generated the bi-annual History Workshop Journal. In 1980 was formed the History Workshop Federation, and History Workshop Bulletin 1 appeared in the September of that year. Committed to the "democratisation of historical practice" and to demonstration that "the career historian had no monopoly of writing and research", <sup>14</sup> History

-- Workshop has been

"a coalition of full- and part-time historians, bringing together... worker-historians and absolute beginners with more experienced researchers...(and) proclaimedly both socialist and feminist." <sup>15</sup>

Of the History Workshop Federation the launching "working group" wrote:

"We want to challenge those broader damaging divisions which segregate the discussion of the past from that of the present, the professional from the part-timer, the individual work from the collective project... we would also hope to encourage an alternative scholarly practice - to show that it is possible for groups to meet in democratic equality as fellow-workers rather than as masters and disciples, teachers and taught..." 16

Such arguments and aspirations as cited so far might find a home in the introduction to virtually any FWWCP publication. It comes as no surprise, therefore, to find Ken Worpole's explicit acknowledgement of debt to History Workshop:

"...there is no doubt that many of the community history projects were directly inspired by attendance at one or more of the Ruskin Workshops. It was at the Workshop on 'Childhood' in May, 1972, that many political activists, but non-historians, were inspired to see the political importance of the new history movement. Producing shareable and common history from the spoken reminiscences of working-class people seemed a positive and important activity to integrate with various other new forms of 'community' politics. This development coincided with many activists' involvement in some kind of alternative newspaper or printing resources centre which provided the material and productive basis for local publishing." 17

#### Convergent development: Oral History Society

Again interwoven with the theory and practice of the groups under discussion and of History Workshop is the Oral History Society, founded in precisely the year from which I have dated my 'third moment': 1971.

Paul Thompson represents the rise of oral history as both a recovery of traditional practices (eg Herodotus, Bede, Clarendon, Voltaire, Scott, Michelet, Mayhew) fallen into disuse in the bid for a 'scientific', data-aggregated, calculator- and statistics-based history (eg "Il faut  
compter" - George Lefebvre);<sup>18</sup> and also as a conscious, international  
<sup>19</sup>  
(eg Brazil, France, Poland, USA) 'movement' with roots in disillusionment with a reductive, largely quantitative enterprise which, inadequate for all its parade of documentary evidence and statistics-based

20

generalisability, misses the untidy complexity of lived individual and group experiences. Oral history is seen as having roots in common with similar trends in sociology (eg. the search for "approaches to observation and empirically-grounded theory construction other than the survey" - Bertaux, D, 1981, 3), roots visible in seminal anthropological/historical exploration of non-literate societies<sup>21</sup> and in specifically American traditions and initiatives: Chicago School<sup>22</sup> (1920s), 'Studs' Terkel; Allan Nevins (Columbia University, New York, 1948),<sup>23</sup> New York City College Oral History Research Project;<sup>24</sup> Oscar Lewis.<sup>25</sup>

As suggested above the time-span of the vigorous recent outgrowth of oral history practice and developing theory is uncannily parallel with the 'third moment'. Paul Thompson, who has discussed these developments extensively,<sup>26</sup> notes that Arthur Marwick in his

"The Nature of History, published only in 1970 (my emphasis) includes a very catholic discussion of historical sources... Yet... includes no reference whatever to oral evidence as such..."<sup>27</sup>

28

(Post-1970 "achievements of oral history" cited by Thompson outnumber earlier achievements by about 2:1).

As the work of those groups of historical orientation is almost exclusively oral history<sup>29</sup> some of the issues raised by this further vigorous trend are explored below. The nature of the various projects outlined as to the kind of history emerging (eg. 'structure'/'facts', 'theory'/'experience'), the constitution of every (wo)man as historian and the priorities to be given to 'working-class' and 'socialist' descriptors in each respect, has given rise to problems, dilemmas and debates that promise to run as long as the initiatives themselves. Again, some airing of the more pressing issues is attempted below.

#### Orientations and processes

As we have seen is the case in respect of origins so as regards

orientations and processes no two community publishing groups are quite the same. Furthermore, within groups emphases are constantly shifting - for a variety of reasons.

Some groups welcome writing from 'out there' in the local community with a view to possible publication; others make the 'workshop' central, sometimes stressing participatory processes before products to the point where print publishing is rare. Some groups regard pub readings, agit-prop theatre performances, etc. as their main modes of publication while others combine a wide range of activities. One group will produce chiefly poetry (sometimes a reflection of the interest of an influential member at the group's formation); another, autobiography; a third, people's history. One group will emphasise black writing; another, women's writing; a third, gay writing, and so on. (Some community-type publishing, including distribution, has been undertaken by individuals - eg. Andy Croft - and examples of self-publication and distribution have occurred recently, as in the 'first moment' and earlier).

Some - perhaps most - groups must be seen as plural, even federal, rather than monolithic; the more obviously so are sometimes referred to as 'umbrella' groups in FWWCP discourse. Striking examples of this are Centerprise (Hackney) and QueenSpark. The former - probably the best-known initiative - has as example embraced Hackney Writers' Workshop, Hackney Young Writers' Workshop, adult literacy publishing and People's Autobiography of Hackney as well as myriad non-publishing activities. QueenSpark, in addition to what has been referred to above, presents a picture of variety, energy and sustained achievement. Between 1972 and 1985 were published 30-odd editions of the campaign newspaper, plus supplements; 15 books (individual autobiographies: a scholarly edition of a nineteenth century local working-class spiritual autobiography; an anthology of women's writing; two theme/campaign



books combining - apparently uniquely - oral historical evidence, research, analysis and comment; an exercise in biography of a local chimney sweep and champion of the underprivileged). As at January 1985 QueenSpark activities included a women writers' workshop, young people's workshop and anthology, school anthology of working-class writing, local working-class district oral history, people's photography archive. In addition, ways were being explored to develop both new ways of assembling and making accessible with the help of 'new technology' considerable numbers of those manuscripts of working-class people for which the resources available do not stretch to full-scale publication, and a non-threatening, constructive, "people's criticism service"<sup>33</sup> to those whose manuscripts are not selected for publication.

Illustrative of the variety of processes (as well as of origins) of community-publishing groups is the People's History of Yorkshire project. This is part of the Yorkshire Arts Circus, a group of artists (painters, photographers, actors and writers) who produce related exhibitions, performances and publications - including 'radical postcards'. First, David Prudhoe (an industrial landscape painter) and Brian Lewis (art history specialist and continuing education lecturer) produced in 1979/1980 an exhibition plus catalogue on the Featherstone Disturbance of 1893.<sup>34</sup> Then, in the context of Mexborough Continuing Education class entitled 'Call that a play? I could do better myself' (founded on "optimism in the belief that anyone who'd been sat in front of a television for twenty years could write a television play: all they had to do was have a bit of confidence and a bit of nous about how to start"),<sup>35</sup>

Brian Lewis encouraged and edited for publication a (superb) autobiography of childhood by Evelyn Haythorne,<sup>36</sup> before producing, with David Prudhoe, an exhibition of paintings around the book (which became part catalogue). Then a play script was developed and linked

performances staged in community centres, pubs, clubs, libraries and schools, and at the Yorkshire Miners' Gala and Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Like QueenSpark a remarkably flexible and innovative project People's History of Yorkshire has both taken on manuscripts sent in (typically brought out of drawers and attics after their authors have come across P H Y books) and generated its own. Furthermore, its processes have attracted as much interest as its products: "People keep asking how we do it...It's become almost a cottage industry". In progress is a formally unique project with old people around Pontefract. This aims to develop a form of fictionalised local history, drawing on the the testimony of people of sixty years and over. There is to be a major 'core' book (with a substantial print run and wide circulation) plus a cluster of 'fringe' books (using a standardised three-colour cover, a print run of perhaps fifty and circulation limited to an immediate area, or say, an old people's home). Thus, any given first-time writer is likely to contribute to the core book and certain to find full expression in one of the 'fringe' books:

"The major thing is not the actual writing: it is causing old people to think they're valued." <sup>39</sup>

Some groups build consciously - or with developing consciousness - on the work of local writers or a local tradition. Strong Words (Tyneside) have drawn inspiration from 1930s working-class writer Jack Common (1903-1968); <sup>40</sup> some contemporary Liverpool working-class writers have been keen to recover and celebrate the work of seaman George Garrett; <sup>41</sup> Ken Worpole, a key figure in the work of Centerprise and the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, has increasingly turned his attention - and drawn that of many others - back to a neglected tradition of East End working-class writers of the 1930s and 1940s; <sup>42</sup> QueenSpark once <sup>43</sup> made an explicit appeal back to the Brighton Co-operative Benevolent Fund Association, created in 1827, one of whose

rules suggested "members... should meet at the room and form themselves into classes for mutual instruction ...labour must be directed by  
44  
KNOWLEDGE."

Some groups are more programmatic, or more explicitly programmatic, than others - a tendency sometimes partly deriving from the need to present a case in pursuit of funding. Most groups ( S E 1 People's History is a striking example)<sup>45</sup> have seen it as important to be very explicit about their processes, especially those by which books come into being.

Aims <sup>46</sup>

"If I don't scrawl  
my name on a wall  
will you recall  
me at all?"

Jim Scouse, Graffiti

A consideration of publications from some 50 groups suggests a general eagerness to be explicit about group aims. Because of the evolving interests of most groups - and the federal nature of many - it is impossible to take any one statement from a group as definitive:

"We are not necessarily political bedfellows because  
we find ourselves between the same covers." <sup>47</sup>

However, some groups' successive statements show clear stability of emphasis while across the country there emerges a broad consensus about fundamental purposes.

Bristol Broadsides stress repeatedly:

"Our aim is to give local people the chance of putting their words and writing into print." <sup>48</sup>

This redressing of what is essentially a class/historical imbalance of access to writing and print is a purpose fundamental to all community

publishing groups. <sup>49</sup> Commonword (Manchester) have consistently emphasised

their attack on a middle-class domination of writing and print - the  
 50  
 need to establish a "bridgehead":

51

"Why let other people speak for you?"

52

53

Trinity Arts (Birmingham) and Write First Time (Bedford) also  
 explicitly announce such an aim.

Commonword (Manchester) have regularly for more than a decade  
 sought to challenge dominant critical assumptions about literature:  
 chiefly those of an 'elitist' lit-crit establishment, but also at times  
 54  
 those of a doctrinaire "People's Vanguard". This aim - of developing  
 new criteria for validating working-class writing - is far from uncommon.

Interwoven with the two preceding areas of purpose is the robust  
 assertion - again, paradigmatically by Commonword - of the validity of  
 both nonstandard working-class language and the writing of those many  
 55  
 working-class people hitherto inhibited by shortcomings. Encouraging  
 into publication those who thus have never written, and emboldening 'closet  
 writers' to 'come out', has regularly been an explicit intention of  
 Commonword. The flavour of their approach is caught - cheerfully - in

"Mystery prize in our spelling mistakes competition.  
 How many can you spot?..." 56

and most dramatically in the publication of Leslie Wilson's fascinating  
 and technically highly idiosyncratic Dobroyed, 'miscues' and all. 57  
 This reassuring aim is almost universally shared, as will emerge below.

The stated aims of Commonplace (Ealing) have foregrounded cultural  
 celebration and development, stressing the "common culture" of working  
 58  
 people. Postmill (Normanton, South Derbyshire) seek "to express the  
 identity of the community". 59 This chimes with a widespread preference for  
 publishing accounts of experience that readers are likely to recognise,  
 to identify with as typical and in some sense representative, 60 and, as  
 happens constantly, that working-class readers will want to 'annotate'

61 and extend. The celebration of local, oppositional figures 62  
may perhaps be linked with this set of intentions.

The promotion of writing as an intrinsically valuable activity is one of the explicit aims of a small number of groups. Liverpool 8 is an example:

"Our common interest is in the craft of writing...to encourage 63  
ordinary men and women to express their talent through writing."

Linked with this are statements from Yorkshire Arts Circus:

"Yorkshire Arts Circus is committed to making the arts more accessible...(it) sees itself in an educational as well as artistic context. From brief discussions of performances and exhibitions to workshops and full day conferences, we encourage active response to our work and seek to bring more people to enjoy the arts both as spectators and participants. Often, members of the audience begin to tell their own stories, in the way people do when they recognise their own experience in someone else's." 64  
(My emphasis)

Publishing as 'offering a model' and encouraging emulation has become a stable - perhaps secondary - explicit aim of some groups. Peckham Publishing Project have given weight to this, as have Trinity Arts (Birmingham). Stimulating community publishing itself is perhaps 65  
the central purpose of In the Making (Wolverton, Buckinghamshire).

The aim is extremely pervasive of developing an alternative/oppositional working-class local history: of "democratising history", 66 of encouraging people to see themselves as part of history, as making history and as potential historians. Bristol Broadsides, Commonword, QueenSpark (Brighton), People's History of Yorkshire, People's Publications and Strong Words(both of Tyneside), East Bowling History Workshop (Bradford) and S E 1 People's History are examples. Tens (at least) of other groups have enacted (if not explicitly avowed) such a programme. 67 One of the two American groups whose projects I have sampled - Community Documentation Workshop (New York City) - have high-lighted just such a cluster of historical aims:

"To encourage ordinary people...to see themselves as part of history and the active bearers of that history; to create a structure from which to reflect on the meaning of that history..." 68

Part of this historical thrust is just that urgency as was noted in respect of the first moment: to record and preserve (for family, community, outsiders) experience in danger of being lost 'without trace'. People's Press of Milton Keynes provides one example; 69

70  
Joan Gale's The Blaydon Races and Fred Roberts's Recollections (Swinton, Manchester)<sup>71</sup> two more.

That the myriad activities involved in realising the above aims should be part of community action and transformation is explicitly prioritized by several groups.

Community Documentation Workshop (New York City):

"...to be supportive of the people - particularly the young people and the children - who live in the area " 72

Strong Words (Newcastle upon Tyne):

"Strong Words is based upon the belief that it is important to retain and strengthen the cultural heritage of the labour movement in a way that allows working people to benefit from each other's experiences" 73

Scotland Road (Liverpool):

"...its very presence seems to us an act of solidarity with the struggle of working-class people for the rights and recognition that their numbers and contribution warrant " 74

Bonfire Press (incorporating Dustbin Press, Lambeth and Southwark):

"Through discussing our own and each others' experience we may better understand our collective position and learn how to act politically. We hope that the publications may also be of interest to people in similar situations far from South London". 75

Finally, two brief statements of group purpose capture a wide spectrum of explicit community publishing aims. The first is from the second of the American groups mentioned above, West End Press (Minneapolis):

"our aim is to promote both the literature we publish and a **style of work** which emphasises cooperative behaviour with an eye to obliterating altogether the distinction between writer and publisher, publisher and reader, reader and writer." 76

The second is from QueenSpark (Brighton):

"The aim is to make our own history, and to smash the divisions between writers and readers, consumers and producers of print, between Literature and what most of us want to say and write. And to stop means of communication being used as they mainly are now - as ways to isolate and divide. We would like to associate together in order to control our own area and produce our own future." 77

#### Context:time

Chris Searle's famous 1971 initiative was, as already mentioned (Note 1 above), influential in the development of community-published working-class writing - but catalytic and galvanic rather than explanatory. For explanation of why community-published working-class writing has so flourished in the past fifteen years perhaps two main factors need to be considered.

First is the growing availability of new, simple and cheap means of printing and publishing, restoring and then going far beyond opportunities available to working-class people in the 'first moment'. These means may be seen in terms of two successive technological 'generations'. First came access to typewriters and photo-litho print processes (and, which is often ignored, the cheapening of older obsolescent printing equipment to within the means of some shoestring organisations). 78

This allowed primary producers of texts to control in all respects how a book would appear. The excitement and sense of urgency engendered by the realisation of these opportunities is palpable in the community publications and conferences/'workshops' offered by the initiated as contribution to 'spreading the word'. 79 More recently, the importance of word-processor technology has begun to be realised, among community publishers

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(see above) as among English teachers. The value to the projects under discussion, and especially to beginning writers, of any accessible technology which facilitates revision, editing, reproduction and storage of texts, is immediately evident.

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Technology, however, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, is unlikely to determine anything: rather we must always look to the uses to which technologies are put. Similarly, we must in respect of community-published working-class writing look beyond technology to social, political and economic factors for the most potent explanations.

Following and developing out of the rise of 'counter cultures', the 'alternative press', street mural painting (Barthelmeh, 1982) etc in the 1960s, a marked socio-political trend of the years during which community-publishing has been developing (currently in dynamic tension with a centralist, 'authoritarian populism' infused with a consumer ethic) has been away from the provided and imposed solutions of specialists and of bureaucratic, monolithic political parties and governments, away from treating people exclusively as clients and consumers and towards decentralism, collective self-help, self-organisation and a "face-to-face

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politics". "A rotting of public confidence in public institutions", a growth of what Ralph Miliband has called 'de-subordination' as working-class people have become aware that the promises on which they 'contracted' their participation in the post-1945 'settlement' show scant sign of realisation,<sup>84</sup> widespread disillusionment with solutions to problems-as-people-experience-them, for example of housing, education, poverty, injustice and inequality, have led to calls for policy-makers to listen much more to those who stand to be affected by their policies once made and enacted (calls heard especially in the aftermath of the 1983

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General Election). It has fuelled a drive towards a more participatory democracy, vestigially realized in such developments as workplace democracy, workers' co-operatives, tenants' and environmental



campaigns, alternative newspapers and schooling, and teacher, parent, student and community representation on governing bodies within education.<sup>86</sup> Rejection of paternalistic state provision has been in favour of small-scale, 'bottom-up', grass-roots (and increasingly networked) initiatives responsive to local and particular needs, and founded on the belief that people must in collaboration describe analyse, prescribe and act for themselves.

Community publishing of working-class writing is recognizably part of the tendency sketched above, part for example of an answer to questions posed by Marion Glastonbury:

"How can our grandparents' experience of the Depression be effectively presented to the young who seem condemned to re-enact it? How can we get architects to listen to high-rise tenants; bring the thoughts of the unemployed to the attention of the DHSS; persuade the Home Office and the judiciary to take account of what happens inside jails?"<sup>87</sup>

In the mid-1980s, with a deepening crisis in economic, political and social relationships, such initiatives become both more important than ever and more difficult than ever to mount and sustain.

#### Context: Place

The emphasis, suggested above, in respect of locality, community and decentralisation is reflected in the patterns of location of the initiatives under consideration.

We have seen above that whereas the 'first moment' was characterised by considerable regional variety in respect of place of publication, by the time of the 'second moment' this had shifted decisively and almost exclusively to London. The 'third moment' represents in this respect both a return to the earlier pattern and a seizure by participants of more and more detailed control.

The strongest centres of group activity since 1971 (in both quantity and influence - although not necessarily in other ways) have, arguably, been (in alphabetical order) Brighton, Bristol, Liverpool, (East) London, Manchester, South Yorkshire and Tyneside. Of these, given both the patterns of earlier development explored above and broader configurations of working-class history, only Brighton perhaps seems surprising. However, evidence of a creative tradition of working-class cultural and political activity in Brighton is gradually being recovered, and there, as elsewhere, the influence of potentially supportive institutions (such as formations within Sussex University and Brighton Polytechnic) and the intervention of particular highly energetic, imaginative and committed individuals in inspiring but not dominating stable group organisations may well be decisive. <sup>88</sup> In

addition, Raymond Williams's discussion (Williams, 1983c, 246-248) of Robert Tressell's writing The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists along the coast at Hastings (a "mixed community" (247) of vividly-realised class contrasts and dependencies rather than a "self-conscious and confident working-class community" (246)) is suggestive in considering the vitality of working-class writing/publishing within the QueenSpark project.

In terms of publications, some areas appear (to the London-based observer) to have been relatively (and surprisingly) muted: for example, the South Midlands and the Scottish Lowlands. Establishing (or disproving) this and exploring related factors such as, perhaps, the incidence in such areas of other community projects and patterns of regional funding policy, might establish a fuller understanding of the preconditions of prolific community publishing processes.

## Seven

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers:

Processes and Debates

In the five years from 1971 certain of the community publishing groups developing around the country began

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"to visit each other, correspond and exchange ideas and experience."

A weekend discussion in 1976 led to the foundation, in the same year, of  
2  
the FWWCP.

#### Purposes and approaches

The FWWCP exists to promote the range of group aims sketched above.

Clause 2 of its constitution speaks of furthering

"the cause of working class writing and community publishing by all means possible, including workshop organisation, local and national performance, fund raising, and liaison with such persons and bodies as may be appropriate."

In the decade since its formation the FWWCP has, always as a shoe-string organisation, sought to forward its purposes with energy, imagination and ingenuity. A selection of activities includes:

- 1 Annual General (Weekend) Meetings, including besides all the expected activities, opportunities for groups to read and sell their work to each other.
- 2 Regular (monthly) 'rolling' meetings of an elected ten-person Executive Committee - in Birmingham, Brighton, Bristol, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newcastle and Nottingham so far. (The recital of towns and cities has point if one considers transport costs and the unemployment/low-paid employment of many FWWCP members).
- 3 Production and circulation of minutes, discussion papers, publicity material and the first national anthology (Writing, 1978).
- 4 Maintenance of two (north, south) travelling 'bookstalls' and their installation at appropriate events (eg. conferences, bookfairs), with publicity through personal contact a strong secondary purpose alongside selling.
- 5 The appointment, from within member groups - when funding has allowed - of paid national coordinators to promote FWWCP aims and to report regularly to the membership.

- 6 Visitation of applicant groups.
  - 7 Responsibility, since 1980, for Voices, a national magazine of working-class writing.
  - 8 Organisation of overseas tours: eg to Ireland and U S A.
  - 9 Negotiations over distribution, including support of 'grass-roots' bookshops, so often the targets of physical/fire attacks.<sup>3</sup>
  - 10 Funding negotiations.
- This latter activity has occupied much group and FWWCP time and energy, sometimes controversially.<sup>4</sup> Some brief consideration here illuminates some of the major issues of this study.

#### Working-class writers, community publishers and funding

At local level many, perhaps most, FWWCP groups, and certainly many beyond, have received financial support from the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs). Relationships have been generally good; attempts to influence or control group projects have not been reported.

FWWCP at national level have received support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, allowing maintenance of a national coordinator for some months. From 1982 to 1985 funding via the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) maintained FWWCP 'literature development' workers.

Negotiations with the ACGB have become a way of life for the FWWCP. At different times members, and some observers, have seen them as an immense waste of time: a 'diversion' from the central business of writing, publishing and distribution. However, it has become clear that apart from the intrinsic value accruing from having paid national coordinators, if only on a temporary basis, there have been less tangible 'spin-off' values.

In 1978 ACGB, on the recommendation of the Literature Panel, granted £200 towards the publication of the first anthology, mentioned above. Subsequently, in the same year, the Literature Panel

turned down application for funding a full-time coordinator.

This heralded a remarkable series of letters, meetings and reapplications that went on until 1984. Suggestive vignettes of these protracted negotiations include the Literature Panel judging the writing in question as of "little, if any, solid literary merit",<sup>5</sup> while refusing to state the criteria for such a judgement; the (highly significant) suggestions that, given the "sound value" of the work "on a community level... there was little point in organising the groups of the Federation on a national basis" and that the FWWCP should "direct (an) application to the Community Arts Committee of the Council";<sup>6</sup> and finally what is to this study the most pregnant remark of all:

"It is important that we do all we can to increase audiences for today's writers, not that we increase the numbers of writers."

For present purposes it needs merely to be said that all this has forced onto the 'agenda' of first-time working-class writers (among others) such fundamental questions as What is literature? What is 'community art' - and should it find a home under arts funding or that of local authority social service departments?<sup>7</sup> Why should tax-revenue go in huge sums to minority activities, such as opera, that are predominantly consumed by the well-heeled? Why should folk-music receive its funding from the Sports Council?<sup>8</sup> How are funding decisions made and by whom? How are the decision-makers appointed - and why are they dropped? What arguments and interests underpin conflicting policies - such as those sloganised as 'few but roses'<sup>9</sup> and 'let a million flowers bloom'? Why are the outcries at some funding decisions (eg. by the GLC) more shrill than those of others (eg in respect of Covent Garden, the National Theatre - and FWWCP)?<sup>10</sup> While FWWCP "aims are not primarily educational", quite palpable has been the 'consciousness-raising' involved in addressing such questions and the educational by-product of learning the strategies

and tactics of lobbying and representing a case and, say, the implications of an enforced shift in job-description ('literature development worker' rather than the preferred 'national coordinator').

#### FWWCP debates

Clause 3 of the FWWCP constitution reads as follows:

"The term, working class, is open to various definitions, and this is a matter essentially for member organisations to determine, subject to the right of other members and the Federation as a whole to question and debate. We favour a broad definition. By 'working class writing' we mean writing produced within the working class and socialist movement or in support of the aim of working class activity and self-expression. By 'community publishing' we understand a process of producing and distributing such writing in co-operative and mutual ways (rather than competitive and private), primarily for a working class readership".

It is here quoted at length because the definitions it contains have figured importantly in the debates that have marked the development of both the FWWCP and its member groups, and because they signal distinctions and issues of importance to the present study.

#### 'Working-class or socialist?'

From the outset there have been FWWCP members who on no criteria would be thought of as working-class. This, as well perhaps as the absurdity of a class-vetting admission procedure, is implicitly recognised in what is quoted above. Yet the matter of the class profiles of groups has constantly been regarded as problematic. In an AGM 'workshop' considering a 'position paper' with the above title from the Liverpool 8 group (Nottingham, 1980), in friendly but tough commerce between members, it was argued on the one hand that groups should, at least in the early stages, learn from the black and women's movements and be uncompromisingly working-class. Associated with this position was the reported experience that where middle-class group members preponderate then working-class members

"dry-up". On the other hand, Aneurin Bevan was invoked in paraphrase to the effect that "it doesn't matter where you are coming from, it's where you are going to."

Since 1976 the issue of the class credentials of members has gradually changed shape. In recent years three particular strands of writing (and of groups) have emerged (women, blacks, gays) and this has given rise to considerable debate. On the one hand it is widely felt that as writers in these three categories share with 'working-class writers' the experience of oppression there is in large measure an identity of interest. On the other hand it continues to be argued forcibly that what is essential to FWWCP, and its unique province, is working-class writing: that middle class writing, albeit feminist, black or gay, does have other outlets.

A problem admitted in connection with the movement's placing emphasis on working-class rather than socialist was put in the same discussion paper, (page 2) as follows:

"...it may acquire a right wing, populist or lumpen membership whose writing, far from furthering the working-class cause... may turn out to be reactionary, racist, chauvinist or at least nostalgic, irrelevant and soft-centred."

This has been a perennial problem.<sup>12</sup> Writing has sometimes been produced that is open to charges of these kinds and has generated considerable discussion around the notion of censorship. By and large the pre-dominant view has been that FWWCP publications "must express the strong views that working-class people have" (contributor to discussion, AGM, 1980) - that where they are of the kinds sketched above they need balancing with other views, preferably between the same covers.

As one contributor put it the following year:

"...suppressing sexist, racist pieces is trying to do readers' thinking for them."



From the debate outlined above, and from Clause 3, two main strands emerge; these concern writers and writing. The two following examples represent related explorations of these aspects.

'Working class Writers, Middle Class Managers'

"As anyone with experience of 'collective work' knows, small scale organisation does not abolish powers and inequalities of initiative, direction or definition..."<sup>13</sup>

A 'workshop' with the above (underlined) title took place at the 1981 AGM. What underlay it was recognition of the importance of the contribution of 'middle class intellectuals' in the work of prominent groups and of the FWWCP itself. Contributions made included noting the tendency for middle-class people who have grown up with advantages like private telephones and transport etc to be expected to take the lead in certain situations; that some working-class writers find it easier to accept criticism from middle-class than from working-class colleagues; that (this from a member with higher education experience) working in the groups resembled student experience at university, with its deadlines for writing, 'seminars' where work is criticised ("marked"), rounds of meetings and minutes ("like the students' union") - plus "a chaotic social life"; that far too frequently "middle-class Federation figures tend to be in control" - especially of those groups most involved with book publishing (as opposed to groups stressing readings, for example).

Briefly, two sharply contrasted views have emerged. On the one hand a "deliberate policy to eliminate middle-class control" has been urged; David Evans (of Scotland Road, then of Liverpool 8) has consistently both argued for and practised this.<sup>14</sup> Ken Worpole (Centerprise, Hackney Writers' Workshop, Tottenham Writers) has suggested the issues are too complex to allow of simple solutions:

"I'm not self-liquidating. It's also where I belong. I'm not going to move out. It is reciprocal. I'm learning."<sup>15</sup>

As regards patterns of control, suggested waysforward, it was argued, might come from contemplating the tradition of working-class associations and institutions. For example, the Co-op (the world's twelfth largest business in 1910) gave more importance to the quarter than to the year in its affairs, holding quarterly elections, and so on. Just as the FWWCP had learned from the practices of working-class clubs, friendly societies and trade-unions-before-full-time-officers - for example in developing 'rolling executives' - so innovations like quarterly elections might lead to more rotation of offices and therefore more sharing of experience and control. The continuing search for innovative structures and forms was seen as essential to the development of the FWWCP.

#### The 'nostalgia' issue

Reminiscences - 'popular memory', 'people's autobiography', 'oral history' and so on - have figured prominently in community publications since 1971. While unaffectionate accounts of grim conditions and ex-  
 16  
 periences have been common, yet fond recall of warm relationships and joy snatched against all odds, the reconstruction of the "good old bad old  
 17  
 days", airings of what have been called the 'sociological myths' of the organic community and the extended family (Laslett, P & Wall, R 1972) - all these have been perhaps equally so. Publication of such material has led to worries about 'quietism' and/or dismissal as 'nostalgia'. Chris Miller has charged QueenSpark (Brighton) with "a lack of political clarity", of not attempting to "produce a socialist understanding of their history":

"...(working class autobiographies) alone cannot 'make history', if by that one means to understand and ultimately control it. Such an understanding, which requires an analysis of the major forces shaping our lives, entails the linking of our experience with those of others, through study, reflection and critical but supportive debate, initially, through a dialectical interchange of ideas and experiences tested against known evidence, but ultimately through collective political action." 18

Eight months before that was published, at the FWWCP AGM in April, 1980, a 'workshop' had been devoted to the problem of 'nostalgia'. The focus had been especially upon the emergence, experience and trajectory of the East Bowling History Workshop (Bradford) whose members are predominantly beyond retirement age. The following contributions give a flavour of the event:

"I was so hungry I couldn't concentrate at school "

"Now it's smokeless we can see the moors "

"The doctor sat up with my mother all night "

"After you were fit again you paid if you could, not if not."

"Now you go with a boil on your neck and you come out with 'flu' as well."

"We used to get medicines; now we get drugs "

"Doctors used to be very local; now they're two miles away. And no weekends. So now we fight for that."

"There was nothing sordid about back-to-backs "

"'Nostalgia' has led to new back-to-backs as opposed to high-rise "

"The old planning of the railways was excellent: with the cuttings you never knew where they came through "

"The main line enters Edinburgh invisibly"

"Now we've a six-lane highway ruining our community "

"A walk through Aldgate that took two minutes now takes ten: and (with the underpass system) you never know what street you are coming up on."

"By looking at East Bowling and the bulldozers we got angry. So we formed the East Bowling Community Association to fight for the community."

"If we don't record the past young people won't know how fortunate they are "

"If you've got good memories as well as bad why brush them under the carpet?"

"We've got to take the ~~best~~ of progress alongside the best of 'nostalgia' "

"You need to put down roots to grow."

"Control's getting further away all the time. We want to bring it home again "

The hints contained in the above of the links and processes between reminiscence and political action were made explicit in the story of the East Bowling History Workshop.

Lydia Merrill, a community educator in the area, reported on

"a deep sense of regret that an area which had once been a proud and busy industrial community, with a real village life of shops and pubs and local characters, was now a back-water, tucked away between a six-lane highway, a now virtually unused park and the uncrossable ring road. It was an area with no recognition and no centre."

Building on an unemployed man's existing interest in local history the Workshop came into being.

"At the time, I saw the Workshop as a fairly formal 'course', where one of the prime objectives would be a social get-together and an opportunity for people to look back on their lives and re-evaluate them, sharing experiences and developing an historical perspective and analysis. I hoped to help people to formulate, even formalise, their own history - what eventually happened was this and far more than this."

19

"What happened" included a process leading to publications; the formation of a group (with constitution and officers); negotiations for funding etc. Of most significance to the present discussion - group members' reflection on their collective past provided a context for the analysis of present circumstances and proposed future developments. The outcomes were impressive and of telling importance to the present study: a group member, during a visit from "an official body" was reported as describing the Workshop as "giving life back to our village"; group members became the prime movers in developing a Community Association, in opposing a local redevelopment plan (a campaign involving the preparation and distribution of leaflets, including their translation into Hindi and Urdu) - and in founding and producing a community newspaper.

About a year before this AGM 'workshop' I had undertaken some preliminary discussion of the 'nostalgia' issue (Gregory, G T, 1979, 121-128). From this the following points may be noted: that while the

the dangers of "drifting into sentimentality about the past" must be acknowledged, what readers (reminiscing in their turn and drawing their own conclusions from comparisons of past and present) - what they bring to and make of texts may not be predicted; that indeed contrasts between earlier spontaneous welfare arrangements for the care of the sick and the old, on the one hand, and contemporary provision, on the other, may not be entirely to the advantage of the latter; that socio-political change has often had its roots in the contemplation and inspiration of features of the past.

The present issue is of particular importance to this study in that its analysis cautions judgements of products (eg books) in ignorance of the processes of which they are part. (See, for example, the integration of products and processes (of community action) in the QueenSpark project referred to above). Community-published books (including and perhaps especially autobiographies) are often in a number of ways the start rather than the end of processes: in themselves a form of political action, they typically come early in the trajectory of individuals' processes of reflection-telling-analysis; they have a well-documented 'knock-on' effect of encouraging others to exclaim, <sup>21</sup> reflect, <sup>22</sup> compare <sup>23</sup> and sometimes to publish: ie what actually happens when readers read as distinct from the 'lit crit' model underlying much educational practice; and, as above with East Bowling (and analogously in other instances such as the move from attending a weekend writers' workshop to going home and forming a Women's Education Group on the part of a group of Bottle women) <sup>24</sup> they have been catalytic to other forms of action. To find community-published reminiscences wanting because they fail to develop "correct" analyses and programmes for political change is inappropriate in a number of ways.

First, no such implied 'agenda' has been agreed:

"There has been criticism recently of...local autobiographies by socialists who feel that individual accounts of personal experiences are so subjective and localised that they may in fact militate against a collective, socialist project by confirming the individualism of social experience so central to capitalist and puritan ideology...Where such criticism fails for us is in the assumption that everybody knows exactly what socialism is, knows that they want it and knows how to get it. Working people do not cease to be the bundle of contradictory, often bourgeois ideas and feelings, when you start calling them a class and not a people. Of course it is easier to publish only the autobiographies of militant shop stewards to propagate the myth that this represents the truly authentic working class experience. But then that leaves the majority of working people behind with nothing of any value to contribute to the making of socialism, wherever she may take us." (My emphasis). 25

Second, community-publishing groups are nothing if not "bottom-up", "grass-roots" initiatives giving voice to what people actually feel and think, however much that turns out to be "a reflection of bourgeois thinking". 26 They exist precisely because of disenchantment with externally provided solutions, precisely to enable (predominantly) working-class people to explore their experiences. This involves 'travelling' - the formulation and sharing (in print) of experience - inevitably prior to any 'arrival' - the analysis, synthesis and possible 'extrusion' into the theory and practice of change.

Third, the general 'nostalgia' critique seems often to be based, as well as on unfamiliarity with whole group processes, on limited samples and sampling of texts. It tends to ignore, for example, evidence of strategies designed precisely to probe people's sense of "the past/present relation":

"One subject in particular had come up repeatedly: the impression that violent crime today was far worse than in the past. To an elderly person, the media coverage of street crime and violence generally seems a daily and brutal contrast to childhood memories of peaceful neighbourhood life. We...wanted to challenge statements such as 'Youths never attacked old ladies in our day', and got copies of one or two local press reports from the 30s to extend the discussion." 27

Brighton on the Rocks (with its unique blend of working-class oral testimony, its sophisticated and - in revealing its processes - deliberately exemplary documentary research into the impact of monetarism

on the local state, and its unifying grasp of complex economic theory) demonstrates that the dominant model sketched at the start of this section does not exhaust the categories of community-published reminiscence. The processes exemplified by the trajectory of the East Bowling History Workshop both point up the incomplete grasp of the nature of community publishing underlying the verdict on QueenSpark books with which Chris Miller ends his critique -

"Their value lies more in the writers' obvious personal satisfaction in their strengthening of community links in other campaigns and in demystifying the idea that only experts can write" -

and, ironically, begin to match precisely the programme, formulated by W Reich, that Miller recommends:

"We must find the connection with the petty, banal, primitive, simple everyday life and wishes of the broad mass of the people in all the specificity of their situation in society. Only thus is it possible to unify the objective sociological process and subjective consciousness, and abolish the contradiction, the schism between them." <sup>28</sup>

### 'Community'

"To extend the range and fullness of sharing in the intellectual and spiritual resources of the community is the very meaning of community."

John Dewey, 1902 (in NUT, 1981, 5)

Clause 3 of the FWWCP constitution, and debates conducted formally and informally, have as we have seen sought to explore and clarify how the term "working-class writing" is to be taken. The second key term - "community-publishing" - is glossed in Clause 3 as follows:

"By 'community publishing' we understand a process of producing and distributing such writing in co-operative and mutual ways (rather than competitive and private) primarily for a working class readership."

While entailed issues such as the payment of authors and the principles and processes of distribution have received considerable attention in National Federation discussion <sup>29</sup> the apparently fundamental issues around the meaning of 'community' itself have less often been made explicit.

A first reaction to the Clause 3 gloss might be that while it is fine as far as it goes it indeed fails to explain what is meant by 'community' - a notion that is here, arguably, yoked by violence to that of 'class'. In a passage that both offers a definition of community, and that will serve as introduction to some of the problems of its use, Ronald Fletcher (1984, 120) has characterised the tension between community and class, as follows:

"...communities are well-defined collectivities of people who, as a whole, are placed within the collective conditions of a relatively localized territory; who share the problems and experiences of working out a satisfactory order of social life within it - including all the customs and traditions which come to be established over time; and who feel a close sense of belonging - as total persons and families - to it. The important emphasis here is that all the dimensions of social stratification are operative within communities, and that community life and experience always include much more than these. The widest differences of social strata - with the greatest extremes of property or lack of it, education or lack of it, status or lack of it - can exist within the closest sense of shared community, when the division of labour and its mutualities and reciprocities and technical and moral interdependencies are such as to be quite clear. On the other hand, the most uniform equalities shared by people in the closest proximity in urban residential areas can lack all sense of community - if the focus of class (my emphasis) allegiance lies further afield than this, or if interest-group wrangles cut sharply across the apparently shared class boundaries." <sup>30</sup>

The force of "community" in the collocation "community publishing" has been an issue explored, appropriately enough, more in local - 'community' - than in national contexts. Two examples must suffice - the first that of QueenSpark (Brighton).

We have already seen the group's emphasis in its practices on a geographically-defined 'community' in East Brighton. Out of these practices have developed certain theoretical and programmatic proposals that embody an embryonic theory of 'community'. Writing in QueenSpark (community newspaper, No 23, Summer 1979, p 6) Stephen Yeo told how working on a recently-completed book <sup>31</sup> had underlined for him that

"in association you can fight successfully for individual and social changes."

He went on to sketch ideas for self-generated community action and development - including the formation of "Area Unions with Street



Sections and Street Stewards, as associations for struggles where we live, away from work." <sup>32</sup> Finally,

"Instead of reacting to...plans...made by others... we could all see ourselves as creative makers of our own associated lives: we could all help in the production of new and more human social relations..."

Five years on, in Brighton on the Rocks: Monetarism and the Local State - in a final chapter teeming with ideas - the authorial collective elaborate and refine this idea and conclude:

"The answer is not new political parties or more politicians, doing more things for people. What is beginning to happen is that people are showing they want to reshape things for themselves." <sup>33</sup>

From this example of practice stimulating theory (as Naseem Khan has implied it should) <sup>34</sup> what emerges about the idea of 'community' is chiefly that 'community' is more a process than a knowable entity. The thrust is towards making 'community' rather than assuming its prior existence; and what is in the making is a set of interlocking dynamic relationships.

This notion corresponds in detail with an analysis of 'community' undertaken by Raymond Williams. Williams points out that 'community' has acquired connotations of immediacy and locality, has been "the word normally chosen for experiments in an alternative kind of group living": <sup>35</sup>

"The contrast...between the more direct, more total and therefore more significant relationships of community and the more formal, more abstract and more instrumental relationships of

state, or of society in its modern sense, was influentially formalized by Tonnies (1887) as a contrast between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft...A comparable distinction is evident in mC20 uses of community. In some uses this has been given a polemical edge, as in community politics, which is distinct not only from national politics but from formal local politics, and normally involves various kinds of direct action and direct local organization...Community can be a warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships." <sup>36</sup>

The second example of exploration of 'community' comes from beyond the FWWCP - and from a 'community arts' rather than a writing-and-publish-

initiative: Mediumwave (Lambeth). In a penetrating discussion Owen Kelly traces the origins of current drives for self-determination in the face of recent attacks from the forces of centralism "both right wing and left wing"; contrasts genuine community process with attempts by "funding agencies...government departments" and "directive professionals" from outside to promote community growth; and resists arguments that "the notion of community...is now outmoded...that an attachment to it is necessarily romantic and whimsical, like an attachment to steam trains or gas lamps." Kelly's own (persuasive) notion of community is caught in the following:

"...shared activities and goals...an active and self-conscious process. For a group of people to be defined as this kind of living community it is not sufficient that they live, work and play in geographical proximity; nor that to an observer they have habits, goals and achievements in common. These are necessary conditions, perhaps, but they are not on their own sufficient, for it is also necessary that the members of a community acknowledge their membership, and that this acknowledgement plays a recognized part in shaping their actions. Thus although the preconditions for the formation of community are of an objective nature, the formation of community, and its subsequent growth, are by nature subjective. Community then is not an entity, nor even an abstraction, but a set of shared social meanings which are constantly created and mutated through the actions and interactions of its members, and through their interaction with wider society...Community grows as its members participate in, and shape, its growth; and it grows because of its members' participation...We can only speak realistically about community growth where it is self-directed and internally controlled...People are not capable of abolishing all constraints, and still less of abolishing the fact that constraints exist. But it is not just a naive voluntarism to assert that they are capable of changing the specific constraints under which they live...

Once we adopt this dynamic view of community and see it as an oppositional tool in the struggle with the specific limitations forced on us by the centralised and centralising state, then it becomes a goal, a target, rather than a starting point." (49ff).

Here, then, is an attack on static definitions of 'community' that goes some way towards addressing the 'class'/'community' problem alluded to by Beatrix Campbell in discussing the Miners' Strike of 1984-1985:

"Both Bishops and the Liberal Party deny the category of class. In its place they offer community v State." 38

There is clearly much to be done to explain the relationship inscribed in FWWCP's very name) between writing that is class based and publishing that is community based, and to construct an adequate theory of the relationship of class and community, as ideas and as entities. However, returning to the Clause 3 gloss quoted above it begins to seem that the stress on "process" takes us further than at first appeared.

Finally, Raymond Williams relates community and the communication of experience in terms that relate especially to the central concerns of the present study:

"Our descriptions of our experience come to compose a network of relationships, and all our communications systems, including the arts, are literally parts of our social organisation. The selection and interpretation involved in our descriptions embody our attitudes, needs and interests which we seek to validate by making clear to others. At the same time the descriptions we receive from others embody their attitudes, needs and interests, and the long process of comparison and interaction is our vital associative life." <sup>39</sup>

### People's History

As suggested above the purposes, orientations, processes and achievements of 'people's history' groups have given rise to considerable analysis and debate, some conducted within FWWCP groups, some <sup>40</sup> among academics beyond. The issue clusters are broadly two: first, those around the idea and practice of oral history; second, those around the value as history of reminiscence (including autobiographical reminiscence) undisciplined by socialist theory - though, as is sometimes argued, organised by 'naturalised', commonsense, unconscious (or 'false conscious') assumptions imposed by a 'dominant ideology'.

### Oral History

"In this matter I am an almost total sceptic... Old men drooling about their youth - No."

A J P Taylor <sup>41</sup>

"We write the history of our own locality...using our own memories, and what we remember from parents and grandparents. Members write down their own stories and bring them to be read out, criticized, altered if necessary, and edited...We borrow

old photographs to reproduce and documents to consult. Everything is discussed and mulled over until a majority agreement is reached, which we consider to be true."

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"The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about events as such than about their meaning...the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure (unless it be literary ones) is the speaker's subjectivity: and therefore, if the research is broad and articulated enough, a cross-section of the subjectivity of a social group or class. They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did."

43

Alessandro Portelli

"history through yarn"

44

Dave Douglass, miner-historian

I have suggested earlier something of the origins of recent 'oral history'; in what follows I sketch something of the matters arising from its practice.

The term 'oral history' is potentially misleading if taken to embody the idea that elicited oral testimony is in itself history rather than the/a source material of history, to which material of other kinds may be added,

45

or that "historical research may be based entirely on oral sources".

(Daniel Bertaux, in the field of sociology research, has made a somewhat parallel distinction between 'life-story' and 'life-history'

(which includes the former but adds documentary evidence to first-person oral testimony). This, then, introduces a first line of discussion that has taken place: around the problem of how far oral source material alone may count as 'history', how far it is necessary to

'triangulate' <sup>46</sup> such material "with public and private archives and other kinds of data (statistics, newspapers and literary works of the <sup>47</sup> period under study, photographs)".

48

"...the weaknesses and strengths of memory"

Paul Thompson

Problems connected with memory have been considerably rehearsed: its aspects, selectivity, reliability, and so on (eg Thompson, 1978, 100-113). The problems are clearly bound up with how the results of

interviews are to be used and 'read'. If objective accuracy of recall is important this may often be checked by reference to documentary sources and/or further oral testimonies. However, this dimension of 'evidence' may be less important than the meaning placed on events/experiences by 'subjects':

"For some purposes, the fiction captured in oral evidence may be more important than 'the truth'." 49

50

Ron Grele makes a series of subtle points from a close-reading textual analysis of testimonies by two elderly New Yorkers, former garment workers. He identifies 'mythic', 'folkloristic', 'prehistorical' qualities inscribed in the structuring of their narratives (reminiscent of the 'mythic' - as opposed to 'historic' - dimensions of pre-literate societies proposed in a famous paper by Goody and Watt)<sup>51</sup> and cites studies that find potent, insightful capacity in the particular historical structures - "usable pasts" - that people construct.

The problem of typicality/representativeness raises similar questions. Random sampling is problematical because it is not possible to interview, or at least fruitfully, anyone a sampling procedure may suggest; and in approaching the elderly - as most oral historians do - as a potential cross-section of their generation in the past (a) "a fully reliable list...is rarely available", and (b) such a list "would distort the past, (taking) no account of migration...or differential mortality" (Thompson, P 1978, 123). Thompson insists that

"Concern for representativeness is essential if oral history is to realize its potential. The worst kind of oral history is that which begins and ends with the daily help" <sup>52</sup>

and in both his own The Edwardians (1975) and in a full discussion of the issues (Thompson, 1978, 123ff) suggests ways forward. However, as Trevor Lummis observes (1977, 52):

"Statistical validity... is only an aid to understanding and is no guarantee of the 'truth' of the surveys that meet its criteria." <sup>53</sup>

Inherent suspicion of the oral as opposed to the written (an issue

clearly of importance to the present study) gives rise to a further source of objections to oral sources. However, this is partly based on an uncritical respect for the written and an unimaginative view of the origins, purposes and intended audiences of documents (such as official reports, newspapers, diaries, letters - Thompson, P, 1978, Chapter 4).<sup>54</sup> Written studies embody data which originated as oral responses to surveyors' questions. Furthermore, some large-scale surveys, yielding 'impeccable' written and numerical data derived from questionnaires administered by teams of paid workers, have been shown to be potentially wildly unreliable: surveyors inventing responses in the case of 'difficult' respondents, respondents selecting as between what is prudent and imprudent to disclose. Alessandro Portelli is particularly telling on these issues:

"'According to verbal information taken...' This is a typical opening formula...of...official documents, and it shows how many written sources are only an uncontrolled transmission of lost oral sources. A large part of the written documents which are granted an automatic certificate of credibility by historians are the result of similar processes, carried out with nothing resembling scientific criteria and nearly always with a heavy class bias...(The judiciary's fear of the tape recorder is equalled only by the similar prejudice of many historians). The distortion inherent in such a procedure is beyond assessment, especially when the speakers are not members of the hegemonic class and express themselves in a language twice removed from that of court records. And yet, many historians who turn up their noses at oral sources accept these legal transcripts without blinking. In a lesser measure (thanks to the lesser class distance and the frequent use of shorthand) this applies to parliamentary records, newspaper interviews, minutes of meetings and conventions, which together form the chief sources for much traditional history, including labour history." (101)

Critical interrogation of the validity of oral evidence is entirely appropriate; as labour historian John Saville has observed, it must be treated as

"simply one more document which you do not believe, but... has to be assessed and evaluated in exactly the same way that you evaluate any other kind of historical evidence." 55

Furthermore, the evaluation of oral material has opened up a long-overdue reassessment of written and other documentary records - including inquiry into how and why some survive:

"These documents and records certainly do not come to be available to the historian by accident. There was a social purpose behind both their original creation and their subsequent preservation." 56

(The class-based differentials as to whose views tend to be preserved represent a - perhaps the - key factor in constructing working-class writing as an 'arena' of important study).

Similarly problematic is the relationship between oral and written historical source material: for example, the presentation, predominantly, of even oral material as written (transcript)<sup>57</sup> - as in the present study; the nature and potential uses of taped archive material;<sup>58</sup> even the practice of destroying tape material...

Aside from the problems 'oral history' gives rise to, a case for it may be made briefly.

First, through enabling the views and experiences of the (individually) powerless to be heard and/or read, it contributes towards a democratisation of history, and to a challenge to authorised versions:

"The working class are the object of records, not the subject. Their school attendances, their apprenticeships, their national insurance contributions, their marriages, their crimes, their divorces and deaths are not recorded for their own benefit or understanding. The figures seek to define, explain and control them."

( C Forman, 1978, 22)

Experience hitherto "hidden from history" (eg stories of undetected petty crime); cross-currents, oppositions, untidinesses, atypical views and experiences which, as with the decisions-only minutes of meetings, go unrecorded - these, gathered in two-way exchange, may now find a place.

Second, oral history enlarges history as activity - and here it is sometimes noted that, uniquely, oral historians generate their own material. It invites also its interrogation and bids to restore agency, dignity and confidence to participants.

Finally, in his seminal (if uneven) paper Alessandro Portelli has teased out a host of qualitative uniquenesses of oral historical

material, proposed some fruitful distinctions and suggested syntheses with developments in contiguous 'fields'. A brief collage of remarks conveys the essence.

Portelli opens up discussion of analysis of oral material as narratives which leap and linger (meaningfully) and display subtle - and again meaningful - narrative variations of what Gerard Genette categorises as 'distance' and 'perspective'. Portelli goes on:

"Borrowing a literary category from the Russian formalists, we might say that oral sources (above all, oral sources from the non-hegemonic classes) are a very useful integration of other sources as far as the fabula - or story - goes: that is the logical and causal sequence of events; but what makes them unique and necessary is their plot - the way in which the narrator arranges materials in order to tell the story. The organisation of the narrative (subject to rules which are mostly the result of collective elaboration) reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationship to their own history." (100)

"The credibility of oral sources", Portelli insists "is a different credibility:

the importance of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in...the diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'untrue' statements are still psychologically 'true'..." (100)

The 'reading' of oral material requires sensitivity:

"an ironical style or an epic one implies a differing historical perspective which ought to be considered in our interpretation of the testimony ...oral sources are always the result of a relationship, a common project in which both the informant and the researcher are involved, together...The relationship between researcher and informant changes as they get to know and trust each other better...what has been called 'revolutionary vigilance' (keeping certain things from an interviewer who comes from another class and may make uncontrolled use of them) is attenuated." (104)

Portelli's final section begins:

"Oral history is not the point where the working-class speaks for itself." (104)

He then takes the following steps:

"the control of the historical discourse remains firmly in the hands of the historian...who selects the people who are to speak; who asks the questions and thus contributes to the shaping of the testimony; who gives the testimony its final published form..." (104-105)



"...the historian speaking through the workers' testimony, (may be) ventriloquising a discourse which is not theirs...Far from becoming a mere mouthpiece of the working class the historian may amplify a personal contribution." (105)

Whereas

"The traditional writer of history presents himself (or, less often, herself) in the role of what literary theory would call an 'omniscient narrator': he gives a third-person account of events of which he was not a part, and which he dominates entirely and from above, impartial and detached, never appearing himself in the narrative except to give comments aside on the development of events, after the manner of some nineteenth-century novelists. Oral history changes the manner of writing history much in the same way as the modern novel transformed literary fiction; and the major change is that the narrator, from the outside of the narration, is pulled inside and becomes a part of it" (105)

"In the writing of history, as in literature, the act of focussing on the function of the narrator causes the fragmentation of this function. In a novel like Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim, the character/narrator Marlow can recount only what he himself has seen and heard: in order to narrate 'the whole story' he is forced to take several other 'informants' into his tale. The same thing happens to the historian working with oral sources: on entering the story and explicitly declaring control over it, he or she must on that very account allow the sources to enter the tale with their autonomous discourse. Thus, oral history is told from a multitude of 'circumscribed points of view': the impartiality claimed by traditional historians is replaced by the partiality of the narrator (where partiality stands both for taking sides and for unfinishedness). The partiality of oral history is both political and narrative: it can never be told without taking sides, since the 'sides' exist inside the account." (105-106)

This analysis sheds light on some transformations arising from the practice of oral history. However, as with the bulk of discussion of oral history to date, what is assumed/posited - or at least strongly 'foregrounded' - is a traditional 'dualistic' model of individual specialist historian and sources of evidence: in this case human informants. Readers are largely ignored. It has been the unique aspiration, and sometimes achievement, of people's history initiatives to undermine this distinction: to blur the line and deconstruct the traditional relationship between historian and informant; to research (including generating their own oral material); to decide their own questions as well as answers; to make and publish their own history

and to do so collectively as part of a continuing, multi-voice, community dialogue. (On the potential political importance of such developments see Mulhern 1981, 11-12).

'Experience' and 'history'

"For a mass of the people to be led to think coherently about the real, present world...is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity."

Antonio Gramsci, 1974, Prison Notebooks, 325, 330

We have seen above that the great bulk of 'people's history' generated by the groups under discussion has consisted of first-person accounts of 'experience', often intermingled with comment, sometimes with analysis: autobiographical reminiscence as history. We have also seen such practices giving rise to criticism - especially that if the approach is supposed to be inductive then there is scant evidence of the disciplined analysis demanded; that the value of even such analysis as there might have been is doubtful in the absence of a 'correct' socialist framework (an argument for 'deduction'); that the very notion of 'experience' is problematic: for example, does not the notion

"confuse the world as it appears to human beings and the stock of notions with which they make sense of it";

(Johnson, 1979, 70)

"'experience' is not anterior to, but rather is to some degree constructed by, the language that gives it form for both writer and reader";

(Stedman-Jones, 1983, 20)

"All experience is penetrated by cultural and ideological categories. It cannot be simply 'read' for its true meaning: it must be interrogated for its complex interweaving of 'real' and ideological elements"

(Hall, 1980, 818-819)

- therefore 'experience must be rigorously evaluated. Accounts of 'experience' cannot represent the reporting of an unfolding, objective reality, in that selections and representations, inevitably theory-laden and within particular 'frameworks' and according to 'conscious' or 'false conscious' assumptions (ideology) always occur...

Some of these problems involve a re-run of the 'working-class' or 'socialist'? debate, reflecting the same uneasiness encountered there about 'ordinary' working-class people reviewing their lives on their own terms, 'correct' or not. They also raise questions about the aims of 'people's history' projects and the relationships between 'experts' and 'non-experts' within them. While it seems likely (at least) that some sort of socialist framework is shared by critics and group convenors alike, certainly the gulf between their approaches and beliefs about processes and products (top/down, bottom/up, deductive/inductive; 'correct' prior framework/gradual DIY framework construction) could scarcely be wider. The two positions are neatly encapsulated by Jerry White and Ken Worpole.

Having made the unexceptionable point that

"individual experience can tell us little about the forces which shape our lives...Contrary to all appearances, Hoxton really doesn't end at Old Street"

- a point increasingly met by groups seeking to 'triangulate' and interrogate many accounts and making increasing use of a range of source materials - Jerry White asserts:

"I would argue for the right to take issue with and confront the way people understand their own oppressions; to be more heavily consciousness-raising than the autobiographical mode usually allows for; to be more concerned with the uses of local history, rather than its production" 59

and appears to suggest a division of historical labour within groups. This, it seems, might well work out, slightly caricatured, as working-class people of scant formal education reminiscing then ideologically sound intellectuals both putting them right and gradually instructing them (if they stay the course) in the performance of routine historical research tasks. 60 Jerry White makes his position clear in an account of his 'experience' with Tottenham History Workshop:

"For a variety of reasons, our work so far has distanced itself from the people we've been talking to; we've not, for example, tried to get individuals to write their own life histories. This detachment has, I think, been only half-conscious, and has been

largely a consequence of our desire to discover and make sense of a collective reality outside individual experience...We felt that the work we were doing was...a prerequisite for understanding individual experience. A people's history is not constructed all in one go but it has to begin somewhere. And for us the beginning was in the general, rather than the particular." 61

Ken Worpole - on the point about "superficial (local) historical consciousness" and valuing coming to know above being told - refers to 62

M K Ashby's biography of her father, Joseph Ashby of Tysoe:

"...Joseph was now interested in the district he was seeing. Three things came to him in this period; some idea of how events elsewhere affected his home and village; some knowledge that other communities produced other manners and other men; and then the sense, to describe it as best I can, that under the wide acreage of grass and corn and woods which he saw daily there was a ghostly, ancient, tessellated pavement made of the events and thoughts and associations of other times."

Referring to group people's history projects he writes:

"Often there have been genuine political difficulties, in that for many people there seems to be no link between past experiences of struggle, hardship and oppression and contemporary attitudes towards socialist and trade union politics. But these difficulties must be faced and talked through ...The autobiographical mode, widely espoused by the local history projects, is the mode of the long revolution, slower, acknowledging difficulties, mixing occasional insights into the prime causes and determinants of life - homelessness, redundancy - with experiences of sudden bereavement, a loving relationship, mental breakdown in the family, the party 63 that lasted for three days, the failed attempt to emigrate."

The fullest response to the critique represented here by Jerry White's paper - the most detailed rebuttal 64 - comes from Stephen Yeo, a leading member of QueenSpark (Brighton) and himself a distinguished professional historian. Yeo insists (here as elsewhere) there are no short cuts to understanding; his paper, which explores themes that run throughout the present study, contains the key sentence:

"We have to try, in the first instance, to learn from these 65 histories, not to teach them what correct socialist theory is."

We shall need to return below to the issue of 'experience'. For now it suffices to stress that what underlay the origins of History Workshop and what sustains people's history groups is an "affirmation of concrete, real-life experience' against what Raphael Samuel calls

'abstracted empiricism'... a dehumanised statistical economic history,  
a labour history concerned with organization" - and against the dangers  
of "theory unchecked by the 'facts'".<sup>66</sup>

## Eight

Community-published writing:

Content and Forms

### Subject-matter and themes

Three introductory points need to be made. First, the large, perennial themes of writing are strongly represented: birth, childhood, adolescence, work, love, marriage, war, bereavement etc. Second, the body of work displays a variety of topic and theme, though produced from a working-class and predominantly urban<sup>1</sup> perspective. Third, it is possible to identify a cluster of major and recurring themes. What follows is an attempt to do so based on a reading of some three hundred publications, as well as on witnessing perhaps twenty five 'performances'. What become clear are some shifts of emphasis, but more strikingly the continuities, as between recent work and earlier working-class writing considered above.

### Home Life

(The oldest writers represented were born around the turn of the century, the youngest have written while still at school. The preponderance relate to home life experience pre-1960).

A great deal of care, and much affection, is given to detailed description of the physical conditions<sup>2</sup> of working-class homes. These were often extremely cramped (especially in relation to family size); typical features were no hot water on tap, no electricity, no bathroom, outside lavatories (shared). In very many cases the 'front room' contained the best furniture etc. the family possessed and its use was restricted to very special occasions and the laying out of the dead. The living room table served many purposes, as we have seen it did for John Clare. A working-class home is often remembered as seeming to visiting children to boast a single exotic item: perhaps an ornament or a framed elaborate greeting card from World War I France.

A pattern of regular tasks/activities constituted a weekly routine up and down the country: Monday - washing ("I did not like Mondays. It seemed to be the age of steam" - Daisy Noakes, Interview) and pawning,

Tuesday - ironing (depending on drying conditions); Friday - visits by various collectors (eg benefit society man); fire-irons cleaned with emery paper; fireplace blacklead; Friday or Saturday night - bath night: 'bathing in '( water heated in a 'copper'; tin bath brought in from the yard and placed before the fire; no privacy as one family member followed another with pause only for skimming off dirt scum and addition of further kettles of 'hot'; the fire side metal getting hot while draughts attacked from behind; perhaps 'Variety Bandbox' on the Light Programme...). 'Bathing out' might be any day of the week - though it was in<sup>3</sup> some older 'plunges' cheaper "the last day before the water was changed".

Description of domestic routines is dotted with old brand names - Oxydol, Sunlight Soap, Parazone, Monkey Brand, Veritas Mantles, Reckitt's Blue, Electrozones; Bisto; Zam-Buk, Snowfire, Melrose - names that work the same, strange, nostalgic magic as "cheap music"; it is also full of such surprises as the sending of children to corner shops for a twist of gun-<sup>4</sup> powder to clear the airways of recalcitrant 'coppers'. There crop up again and again lists of old remedies - for constipation, actual or imagined, (liquorice powder); for pimples (brimstone and treacle); for chesty colds (Russian tallow); for a cough (glycerine, paregoric and syrup of squills); for stomach pains (Indian Brandy and 'Composition'); for 'women's ailments' (Raspberry leaves and Southernwood);<sup>5</sup> for headlice (lysol wash); for house bugs - a problem in perhaps most working-class homes, and see Bezer and Burn in 'moment' I - (fumigation and any number of preparations).

Many working-class people - especially pre-world war II - turned in financial straits to small self-help business ventures: brought up their children, as one woman (b 1911) put it, "by the washtub"<sup>6</sup>. Apart from taking in washing (and sometimes improvising ingenious arrangements for drying in wet weather - such as opening doorways in the roof, front and back, to create a through draught), families kept poultry, rabbits (for food, rather than as pets),<sup>7</sup> pigs (sometimes collectively), pedalled and peddled items for sale round the streets and from door to door,<sup>9</sup>



10

opened front rooms as pie and peas shops. (Such shifts are part of a long working-class tradition: see, eg, Burn, 173; Bezer, 161-162).

Common reminiscences are, as we have seen, of illnesses treated  
 by folk remedies ("My mother was our doctor"),<sup>11</sup> and by the chemist ("Sammy Snowden, Chemist...was known far and wide for his pills and potions...  
 The doctor was only called if things became really serious");<sup>12</sup> of the  
death of a sibling<sup>13</sup> (often from TB); the rituals of bereavement (blinds pulled, black arm bands or diamond patches worn; black-edged cards; undertakers' horses; neighbours' wreaths. Mothers emerge as family cornerstones; making do, holding things together; fathers as dominant, capricious, sometimes tender,<sup>14</sup> far more often brutal. Marriage and marriages (in the years before, say, 1960) tended to survive: "You didn't live over the brush in 1943, not in Rossington."<sup>15</sup> If you tried it

"People used to come up and down outside your house with dust-bin lids, banging them to shame you, if you were living with another man or woman..."<sup>16</sup>

17

The experience of moving house is often recalled - sometimes the  
 'moonlight flit'<sup>18</sup> when the rent was in arrears. Reminiscence of post-World War II experience has dwelt considerably on enforced moves, often into high-rise accommodation.<sup>19</sup> The high-rise flat poem has, as Ken Worpole has observed, become virtually a sub-genre of working-class writing.

#### Community Relationships

"Just look at that!" Mrs Jessop said to me mother as she stood in our garden waiting to be served with some tomatoes. 'It's not decent hanging her knickers on the line like that for all to see. That's if you can call them knickers, by the looks of them they're no more than two bits of lace. You won't catch me hanging out my britchers on the line, I don't believe in other men seeing what I'm wearing. Why can't she wear decent cotton drawers like the rest of us?' 'Well, she won't be wearing them long, she's pregnant.' 'And no wonder!'"

(Evelyn Haythorne, 1981)

Two major themes emerge. First, the claustrophobia of living so close to neighbours who hear your rows, appraise your purchases, discuss your lifestyle, inspect your clothes on the washing-line - even

monitor your visits to the (outside, shared) lavatory.

Yet, second, from among those same neighbours have come the woman who heard labour screams and rallied round, who laid out your dead, the people who clubbed together to buy a school uniform for a scholarship winner,<sup>20</sup> who developed collective institutions and who went on outings together.

### Childhood

Publications since 1971 provide an in-depth portrait of three generations of working-class childhood. Children colonised their own homes<sup>21</sup> as well as the city streets<sup>22</sup> where, having no gardens,<sup>23</sup> they spent much of their time. There is a familiar catalogue of street games, as well as some less familiar accounts - of petty crime, for example. At home and in the street childhood often takes shape as a time of half hearing and half understanding what adults say. One strand of this emerges in (much cherished memories of) misunderstanding particular formulations - especially in church:

"Grace and peace and joy, bestow" (Bisto);  
 "God is still on the throne" (phone);  
 "make clean our hearts within us" (a carbolic soap job);

another in being always just out of earshot of adults' whispered conversations or the half-dupes of their cover-up stories.<sup>24</sup> Children as 'little earners' (in at least two senses and in a variety of occupations)<sup>25</sup> is a common topic:

"Boys of school age could earn some pocket money lathering the men's chins."

(H J Bennett, b 1902, Walworth, 1980, 23)

Participation in the culture of the street is, of course, not confined to children. That culture included a range of itinerant traders and entertainers; bookies' runners (sometimes risking pocketing bets instead of placing them and awaiting race results with interest the keener); street markets; shopping late on Saturday for bargains; Boat



thing right. She never gave us any encouragement. After school I was a very good knitter and partly earned my living by it " 33

or bizarre -

"In the hall was a sloping, longish form, you could lay on it and practise swimming"; 34

denial/denigration of pupils' most potent educational resource - their language. The accounts of their schooling by many working-class people constitute a root and branch indictment of compulsory schooling - and while some parents resisted (by 'coming up the school' to confront brutal teachers, for example) as many more, poignantly, adopted much of the school's view of them and their children:

"In my last report from school the headmistress wrote, 'Alice has intelligence, but lacks care and concentration.' Any mistakes I made after that dad would say, 'That's your lack of care and concentration.'" 35

However, another - if more muted - note is struck. Outstanding, 36 committed "teachers of the people" are celebrated, perhaps half a century on, just as hatred of others remains green. Sometimes schools saw their role as offering a ladder of escape from area and class;

sometimes they prepared bright pupils for scholarship examinations, only to have their proteges disbarred by parents who could afford neither fancy uniforms nor the delayed gratification of a postponed or uncertain pay packet. 37 Again, some curricular provision was strikingly ahead of its time:

"when asked what lesson he remembered Grampy (b. 1896) immediately called to mind the sewing lesson. The boys as well as the girls were given lessons in sewing..." 38

and some teachers anticipated developments (such as the integration of drawing and making in CDT) still by no means complete:

"Old Moore was a craftsman and everything had to be done just so. First we had to draw the article we were going to make, plan, elevation and side view." 39

Again, although the weight of evidence refers to experience before 1960 it needs stressing that a good deal relates to subsequent schooling experience and that, broadly, such material justifies a sense that things have improved (eg on measures like reduction in teacher violence, more equal curricular opportunities, the attitudes of teachers to parents).

Two further categories of educational experience require a mention: religious Sunday schools (a very common experience) and (much less common) political Sunday schools. (It would seem that ethnic minority educational provision - for example, mother tongue classes - has not so far found its way into community publications).

Religious Sunday schooling gets, broadly speaking a thumbs down. Notoriously popular with parents as a means of getting a respite from their children on a Sunday afternoon, Sunday schooling generally though not always comes across as boring, ill-taught (some teachers got the pupils drawing while others read the football results from the Sunday papers, sotto voce and in exchange for quiet. Many pupils played truant; others kept going for the fringe benefits (annual outings, teas etc); still 40 others played truant and forged their attendance cards.

Political (Socialist) Sunday schools would clearly repay further study.<sup>41</sup> There is room here only to note the contrasting warmth of memory attached to them -

"These were a great development for me" 42

"It was all very interesting, I enjoyed our little afternoon talks" 43

"It was more or less about brotherhood" -

and, in passing, the interesting parallels that emerge between the practices of religious and political groups (eg in respect of 'christening').<sup>45</sup>

#### Relationships with authorities/outside

"She felt degraded when an official practically threw her money on the desk at her. He was a well-known character, a huge man who, when it was hot weather would wear a pith helmet and a tropical outfit of shorts and khaki shirt. He was over six feet tall and twenty five stone in weight...He more than likely came from some plantation abroad, for he certainly dealt with people like they were the 'natives'."

Doris White, 1981

"He hesitated and said that should I receive any extra money while drawing the dole, he would unexpectedly call at my house and make sure that the radio wasn't working."

Albert Paul, carpenter-joiner, Brighton, 1981

If teachers are among the first 'outsider' authority figures to impinge on working-class children, a veritable army (of employers, police, bureaucrats, medical professionals, NCOs and officers -

"a Brigadier General with red tape and pips on his epaulettes. I was even more frightened of him than of the Germans" - <sup>46</sup>

Relief Officers, social workers) follow them. Far more thumbs turn down than up; the condemnation of some jacks-in-office carry a passion unwearied by the passing of many years. <sup>47</sup> However, reported experience in this respect has been by no means uniformly negative: the concerned vigilance of a social worker is noted; <sup>48</sup> an old people's home is celebrated in prose poetry; <sup>49</sup> the agencies supporting a wife nursing her paraplegic husband get their meed of praise; <sup>50</sup> a humane Relieving Officer gets his. <sup>51</sup>

52

#### Work

"It's funny - I don't dream very often, but when I do, I'm back at French's leather, and the foreman is standing over me."

Mary Welch, b. 1906, 1976

In contrast with school experience working-class work experience

(when available, and especially in the past) emerges, overwhelmingly, as

nasty brutish and long. By now richly documented are the sheer physical  
harshness of much of it (especially, for example, work in pit, mill,<sup>53</sup>

<sup>54</sup>  
skinyard - and, for women, in working-class homes); dehumanizing working  
<sup>55</sup>  
conditions; the inevitable antagonisms of work relationships; that  
between boss and worker tending to set worker against worker<sup>56</sup> as often  
as promoting worker solidarity, and tending to spread its poison far  
<sup>57</sup>  
beyond the workplace, for example into home relationships.

A different strand teased out by 'insiders' is of what usually<sup>58</sup>  
remains hidden about working-class work; its complexity and subtle skills;  
the fine-tuned relationships between workers and the things they work with.  
(This acquires poignancy in the frequent accounts of deskilling, indus-  
trial decline and collapse).<sup>59</sup> As well as this quiet celebration of  
working-class work there is much warm evocation of the decencies and soli-  
darities of worker-worker relationships.

Other features in relation to the experience of work include<sup>60</sup>  
accounts of the first day at work (recalled as readily over half  
a century as the first day at school); bizarre jobs (eg plying for hire  
<sup>61</sup>  
as a 'human horse' in Brighton; jobs entailing contact with the famous -  
<sup>62</sup> Sickert's barber; <sup>63</sup> Sassoon's milkman); <sup>64</sup> petty crime and unofficial  
<sup>65</sup>  
work arrangements (eg 'the welt') contrived by workers to make life  
bearable.

### Women's experience

"I was coming back from Great Homer Street last Saturday afternoon  
in the pouring rain with a pram full of groceries. Other women,  
with bulging bags and their children, were rushing home to get the  
tea on. Looking dead tired I passed two pubs, and the doors were  
wide open, and all I could see was big, red, laughing faces and  
raised pint glasses..."

Ann Blunt (pseudonym), Liverpool

Although in detail much of this is subsumed under other headings it amounts to a major category in itself. Apart from their heavy representation across the whole range of the publications under consideration, women collectively are producing a growing number of women's publications exploring experiences of unequal opportunities at school; as low-paid, low-status workers; of working a 'second shift' at home (see especially As Things Are, Dustbin Press, 1975); experience of being battered; even of looking forward to childbirth for the bed rest (ten days) that was standard in the past.

#### The experience of minorities

"Many of them had not realised that I was black...and when the dressings were taken off (their eyes), one or two would say, 'Aren't you nice?' or 'Nurse, I never realised you were coloured. You're no different from us...'"

Norma Igbesoko, Liverpool 8, 1980

"One girl is born here, brought up in this racist society - in most cases parents expect her like a girl born in Karachi or Bombay - instead of an apple, expecting a Mango."

Manju, Centerprise, 1984b

The initial point made above as regards women applies also under this heading with regard to the experience of ethnic minorities. Experiences explored include remembered upbringing in, for example, the Caribbean, Asia, Africa; the trauma of 'culture shock' (notably for young women arriving for arranged marriages); the desolate experience of being caught between two cultures; experience of racist abuse/violence.

Minor categories of minority experience (in terms of quantities of text) include those of gypsies<sup>70</sup> and tramps<sup>71</sup>; a stronger and growing strand is of the experience of gay men and women.<sup>72</sup>

#### Reflection on public issues, past and present

"If you're talking about cuts, we've got the ludicrous position



up here that when your gloves wear out, they're issuing us with one glove at a time! They're going to end up with a surplus of left-handed gloves. Yet I know for a fact that a head of section down the Town Hall ordered a new chair for £140..."

Brighton dustman

QueenSpark (community newspaper ) No 31, Autumn 1983,1

As suggested above, whether and how far things have changed for the better is a major explicit issue of recent working-class writing.

Political/industrial issues past and present (eg the effects on working-class lives of government cuts<sup>73</sup> and nuclear fuel and defence policies); rent strikes; experience in the women's suffrage movement;<sup>74</sup> participation in such 'direct action' as derailing the Flying Scotsman during the General Strike of 1926<sup>75</sup> - many such issues are recalled, analysed, discussed. Major events receiving extensive treatment (sometimes entire publications) include World Wars I and II (life both in the Forces - an 'alternative' history - and on the home front). A prominent theme, as we have seen it was in the First Moment (eg Bamford, Maynard Smith), is the devastation and transformation of known environments; especially the cultural impact of 'slum' clearance and enforced migration and re-settlement.

An important, quantitatively minor strand perhaps best included here is that of the reporting and discussion of moments of awakening to new understanding: a pit wife,<sup>76</sup> and many adult literacy students<sup>77</sup> and others<sup>78</sup> to writing, the arts, education; a youth, through a friend's family, to a world he'd never imagined;<sup>79</sup> many and various more narrowly 'political' 'epiphanies'.

#### Language

Many publications include information and reflection on working-class language. One strand of this is explication to 'outsider' readers of working-class vocabulary (eg rhyming slang,<sup>80</sup> tramps' argot,<sup>81</sup> prison antilanguage)<sup>82</sup> and usage. At times, as seen above, writers

supply substantial glossaries; sometimes entire publications  
 are devoted to language.<sup>83</sup> Another (sad) strand is judgemental; woven  
 into some texts (compare, eg, Burn, Lowery - in 'moment' I'- and Coombes)  
 is a sense of the "coarseness" and inferiority of their authors' non-  
 standard accent and dialect shaped by dominant social attitudes, espe-  
 cially as mediated through schooling:

"Their speech was so pleasant to listen to compared to our  
 rough cockney voices...They both had a nice accent compared  
 to my cockney one, which I was very aware of...Her voice  
 sounded so lovely after our coarse cockney voices..."<sup>85</sup>

### Particular topics

Finally, as suggested, there are publications devoted to parti-  
 cular themes: experience of childbirth;<sup>86</sup> prison/approved school;<sup>87</sup>  
<sup>88</sup> bathnight;<sup>89</sup> disability;<sup>90</sup> passive resistance;<sup>91</sup> evacuee experience in  
<sup>92</sup> World War II; Victoria Park (Tower Hamlets);<sup>93</sup> the Broad Street to  
<sup>94</sup> Poplar railway line; life in precisely defined areas ('The Island',  
<sup>95</sup> Clapton; Gilsland, Cumbria/Northumberland); young people's experiences.

### Forms

A number of groups (eg East Bowling, Scotland Road) have pro-  
 duced calendars (local pictures plus captions); some have produced  
 sets of postcards featuring photographs, drawings, text, etc. (eg.  
 Centerprise, Yorkshire Art Circus) or greetings cards (eg QueenSpark -  
 alternative seaside greetings); some have produced packages of cas-  
 settes-plus-printed-text (eg Basement Writers, Stepney - Gladys  
 McGee). Also, as we have seen, there has been, very extensively,  
 'publication' in the form of readings, some 'alternative cabaret'  
 (eg Controlled Attack, Tower Hamlets) and some videos of performances.

Centrally, however, publication has been in book form.

Most publications are in the form of slim A5, photo litho booklets, usually with illustration. Commonly they include detailed information on the processes of, and participants in their production, and (very much in the oldest tradition of working-class association:

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"That the number of our Members be unlimited") invitation to readers to respond and/or join the group. Books are usually illustrated with photographs and/or drawings, charts, cartoons, etc; occasionally there is a photo-essay (photographs plus captions/commentary on a theme) - for example, Paul Salvesson's 'A Threat to the Community' (of Horwich, near Bolton, in the event of the closure of its railway works in 1983).  
97

There are two dominant categories within community-published writing; prose reminiscence/autobiography and poetry. Some volumes are devoted to the poetry of a single person: Joe Smythe (Manchester),  
98  
Joan Batchelor (Manchester, native of the Rhymney Valley, South Wales)  
99  
and Gladys McGee (Stepney)  
100 are examples. Many more are collections of the poems of a variety of people, often with prose pieces (reminiscences, short stories, essays) included. Prose reminiscence/autobiography is probably the single dominant category. What distinguishes them from the work of individuals in 'moments' I and II considered above is the collectivity and collaboration that characterise their authorship and all aspects of their production and distribution. Collective autobiography seems to be a genuine formal innovation of community publishing since 1971.

Volumes of the reminiscences of a group of people are commonly unified by theme and/or historical period. While there are a few books with a framework of analysis and discussion, exposition and

argument constructed from outside working-class experience and into which  
<sup>101</sup>  
 reflections on working-class experiences are inserted - straightforward  
 and (to some extent) representative autobiographical material, written  
 from the 'inside out', predominates. Sometimes such volumes partly take  
 the form of reproduced dialogues between participants; in some volumes  
 the idea of group autobiography is stressed by the dominance or even exclu-  
<sup>102</sup>  
 sivity of dialogue in what is published.

Photographs figure prominently: sometimes criss-crossed with  
 cracks betraying years of storage in wallet/handbag (see, for example,  
The King's Own Yorkshireman, facing p 15, a picture of the author as a  
 boy - caption: "I were a right rascal in them days" ). Often photo-  
 graphs are evidential: eg. of letters from France in World War I or from  
 POW camps in World War II; of trophies and certificates won; of school  
 groups; of trade union documents; <sup>103</sup> of documentary material related  
<sup>104</sup>  
 to, say, an episode of industrial ~~conflict~~ or an individual's struggle  
<sup>105</sup>  
 with 'the authorities'; sometimes of the contemporary circumstances of  
<sup>106</sup>  
 the autobiographer, filmed for the purpose. Mostly, in the manner of  
 family albums, they portray their subjects as they might wish to appear:  
 smartly-dressed, dignified, apparently prosperous, outfacing the world.  
 The mismatch, the dissonance between this story and the grim one the  
 text so often tells, establishes for the reader a special sort of irony.  
 At times the irony seems intentional and commentational; in one case <sup>107</sup>  
 an old photograph (of twenty or so smartly-dressed women on an outing  
 stood behind a single man - seated cross-legged, open-necked, bowler-  
 hatted - the charabanc driver?) seems itself self-parodic. Increasingly,  
 use is made of quality archive photographic material to enhance the  
<sup>108</sup>  
 intended meanings of text.

#### -- Autobiography

"...The urge to write autobiography in itself defines an  
 exceptional man".

Margaret Spufford, in Graff, 1981, 125.

A look at 'mainstream' autobiographies on bookshop shelves suggests three broad categories. First, there are the autobiographies (sometimes 'ghosted') of people who are well-known because of their exceptional status and position in the public eye: aristocrats, millionaires, entertainers, statesmen and women and politicians, sportsmen and women and so on. Second, and overlapping with these, are autobiographies by people who have done or experienced something extraordinary - circumnavigated the world in an unlikely vessel, starred in a 'bootstrap story', been kidnapped, hijacked - which then becomes the centrepiece around which a life story is built.<sup>109</sup> These two categories represent for publishers something analogous to journalistic news value, in contrast to a third (rare) category of autobiographies, made compelling to publisher and reader alike by sheer quality of writing, of experience and its realisation, whose 'legitimation' is by 'literary' criteria.

More generally, Roy Pascal writes of autobiography:

"Its centre of interest is the self".<sup>110</sup>

Most community-published autobiography (or autobiographical writing)<sup>111</sup> rests on an entirely different basis:

"People come in who've led extraordinary lives and they're surprised when we say...that's more the commercial thing. ...We're not publishing things because of the uniqueness of your life; we're publishing autobiographies for their ability to stand for, to represent the common life."<sup>112</sup>

It denies, that is, Pascal's assertion of primacy of interest in the individual self and awards it in some sense to the collectivity.

Community-published autobiographies often appear directed at both a primary, 'insider' readership ("I remember the Moseley route number 1 being extended to Acocks Green")<sup>113</sup> and the kind of secondary, 'outsider' readership (note the glossaries of working-class language referred to above) characteristic of, say, B L Coombes's These Poor

Hands. Many recent examples are in important respects distinct from the earlier work considered: for example, in the collectivity of their production - and often (more narrowly) of their authorship (with sometimes the sense - 'people's autobiography' - of autobiography as itself collective); in that the 'midwifing' roles of others than the 'subject' are very often made explicit; and in that subjects are not required to await fame, fortune or advanced years before starting writing.

(I have tried to argue elsewhere that reading community-published autobiographies affords an attractive way in to the study of the nature and typical circumstances of publication of autobiography itself: that is, of a genre that tends to proclaim itself, and be read and accepted as, the setting down in faithful detail, as interestingly as possible, of what can be recalled of a life - as well as of such questions as: Who typically writes autobiography, at what age and why? Who publishes it and why? What emerges from an analysis of the selections, omissions, silences involved? What theories underpin the representation of life experiences, for example in terms of 'ages', pivotal moments, crises, watersheds, causes and effects, explanations, and from the perspective of the moment of writing and, typically, with the benefit of hindsight?)

Among community-published autobiographies a few locate themselves in the first 'mainstream' category proposed above - and one, perhaps, in the second - rather than in the typical community-published pattern sketched. Furthermore, a single publication belongs to the 'spiritual autobiography' tradition discussed in Part I.

Most community-published autobiographies develop hybrid forms.

Typically and organically, they blend narrative and digressive comment; they employ and combine (more or less intentionally/artfully) strategies of oral and literary narratives (eg plunging straight into action before supplying basic information in a logical and chronological order);<sup>120</sup> structuring the narrative of anecdote to maximum effect;<sup>121</sup> giving salience within the whole to cherished/unforgettable remembered moments:

"...when I visited him in hospital, he said, 'Jim, you looked a picture walking down the ward - a real picture'. I had just returned from a holiday in Wales and wore light casual clothes; I had caught the sun and must have looked good. John was dying. When he did go, I wore those same clothes at the funeral." <sup>122</sup>

"Sometimes the teachers would give us 'Object Lessons'...Either they would bring along an 'object' to remind us of a Bible text or they would ask us children to produce something for them to talk about...These lessons could produce some laughter as for instance when a child brought along a sausage to illustrate the text 'Behold, I show you a mystery!'" <sup>123</sup>

"...suspected dysentery cases (France, World War I) were waiting for tests to confirm it. The ward was full of such cases and in fact there was only one dysentery case there. This bloke, in order to make a bit of spare cash sold them samples of his own stool to put in their chambers to go up for analysis in the laboratories." <sup>124</sup>

Some achieve a seamless joining of the personal and the public, comfortable moves from narrative to political theorizing and back again.

Les Moss, a convinced Marxist who was cruelly disabled, and became locked with the medical authorities in a struggle for justice, is merely the clearest example of this.<sup>125</sup> Interestingly, Joe Smythe says of his first collection of poems - Come and Get Me - that it is "autobiographical in atmosphere if not in events." (Interview, 1980).

Autobiography tends to operate with a sense that what is portrayed figures a process of growth, development, increasing understanding, maturity, wisdom, etc. On the other hand, the same portrayals may include elements of nostalgia which tend, logically, to 'present discontent.'

The tension between these tendencies is everywhere ~~inscribed~~ in community-published autobiography, as is a wistfulness - arising partly from the processes of analysis and writing in themselves - about lives that, but for essentially alterable class and family circumstances, might have been otherwise. Alice Linton (b 1908) closes her story thus at her wedding, at the age of 20:

"Neither of us had a gloriously happy childhood and although we were both young we had experienced life in a hard way. We were not expecting miracles. ~~I had~~ had plenty of experience with how to make the housekeeping money go and I think that all we both wanted was a place of our own where we could find companionship and contentment..." (My emphasis - and the title of Alice's book).

### Biography

Two points need to be made.

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First, there are very few community-published biographies. Grampy and Who was Harry Cowley? <sup>127</sup> (a quest through many interviews for the identity of a former Brighton chimney sweep and tireless champion of the homeless, unemployed, market traders and pensioners) are (rare) examples.

Second, autobiography entails at least brief biographical sketches of 'significant others'. Many community-published autobiographies involve the fascinated and/or loving evocation of such others: sometimes extraordinary, sometimes dominant, always important. At times, months after reading an autobiography, such inset biographies persist in memory at least as strongly as the autobiographer.

### Poetry <sup>128</sup>

"...of all the things in the world which are not immoral, one of the least deserving of encouragement was indifferent poetry."

Edinburgh Review, 54, 1831, 81, in Vicinus, 1974, 171

"...when it is laid down as a maxim of philosophical criticism that poetry ought never to be encouraged unless it is excellent in its kind, - that it is an art in which inferior execution is not to be tolerated, - a luxury, and must therefore be rejected unless it is of the very best, - such reasoning may be addressed with success to cockered and sickly intellects, but it will never impose upon a healthy understanding, a generous spirit, or a good heart."

Robert Southey, 1831, 164



"who alive can say,  
 'Thou art no Poet - may'st not tell thy dreams'?  
 Since every man whose soul is not a clod  
 Hath visions, and would speak, if he had loved  
 And had been well nurtured in his mother tongue."

Keats 'The Fall of Hyperion', II, 11-15 129

"Theories of poetry leave me believing I'm not writing poetry".

Joe Smythe, Railway Guard, Manchester 130

In 1982 Blake Morrison wrote:

"There are grounds for thinking Tony Harrison the first genuine working-class poet England has produced this century... Remarkably, in an age that was supposed to see the flourishing of working-class writing, Harrison seems to have the field to himself." 131

Clearly, the key words here are "genuine working-class" and "poet". Tony Harrison, it turns out, qualifies <sup>132</sup> for the label "genuine working-class" because he keeps insisting on it and because he explores, and "in the very texture of the verse itself", illustrates both "what it means to acquire language in a community which has had none" and the difficulties of negotiating "an unavoidable opposition between the urban proletariat and high culture". Qualification for the label "poet" is not discussed.

These remarks are intrinsically of interest in a study of working-class writers, very many of whom consider themselves, and are generally taken by others to be 'poets' - in at least the sense that they sometimes or habitually write and publish/perform what are intended, classified and received as 'poems'. What makes the above episode especially intriguing is that Blake Morrison had two years earlier been commissioned by the Arts Council of Great Britain to investigate the processes and products of FWWCP writers' groups and had produced a much - admired report. <sup>133</sup>

"Poet" and "poetry" are notoriously resistant to definition; millions have words have been published over the centuries on just this

problem; and there is scant space here to add to them. What can be stated is that since 1971 literally thousands of what have been widely regarded as 'poems' have been community-published and/or performed. Their variety - from attempts at long-established English forms (eg with regular metrical and rhyme schemes) to free verse (some merging into prose) to parody (some gently <sup>134</sup> humorous, some savagely satirical) <sup>135</sup> to dub ranting - matches that of their authors: steel worker, miner, railwayman, prisoner, house-worker, tramp, unemployed teenager, pensioner, CND protester, striker on dawn picket duty, incredulous witness of events in a mining village, and so on. On this evidence and that of earlier 'moments' of working-class writing; on that of the steady stream of workers' poems submitted <sup>136</sup> to trade union journals; even on that of the propensity of people to write verses for magazine competitions and for broadcasting - it is clear that interest in writing poetry is extremely widespread.

Poetry draws attention to itself as artefact - and thus asks to be judged - in ways that tape/transport autobiography, for example, does not. Furthermore, ability to write poetry (from the humblest sort to the most sophisticated) comes even less "as leaves to a tree" than the ability to talk effectively. Specific practice, study, effort, apprenticeship, etc. are all involved, whereas some effective, or partly effective, autobiography has been produced for which the only 'apprenticeship' has consisted of all contingent previous language experience. Few if any people do not produce powerful language when engaged and 'on their own ground'. To add to the difficulties of community-published 'poets' in respect of critical reception - whereas 'mainstream'-published poets (who are more often than not extensively and expensively educated) tend to write a good deal before publishing anything, the former (who are typically ill-educated and/or beginning writers) tend to view publication/performance quite differently: as far less dignified and irrevocable, and with greater confidence in the support and helpful criticism

of colleagues. Hence, community-published 'poems' are often what others might regard as early drafts; and as yet it is too early to know - as we can with the work of, say, Idris Davies in the 1930s,<sup>137</sup> or the nineteenth century work considered earlier - what will survive.

Three points, perhaps, may be made about community-published poetry.

First, unsurprisingly, generalisations are difficult, verging on impossible. The spectrum of effectiveness is arguably far wider than among poems published otherwise: from work so constrained by cliché, by the imperatives of rhyme and metrical schemes and by loss of faith in vernacular language as to offer little pleasure to readers; to economical utterance with vernacular strength -<sup>138</sup> apparently by writers innocent of what might be expected of poetry; to a small number of poets, learned and 'knowing', finding a voice on the far side of experience, and perhaps imitation, of literary models.<sup>139</sup>

Second, it is strikingly the case that many, perhaps most, community-published poems are overwhelmingly more effective in performance (in pubs, book launches, at miners' benefit events - always among sympathisers) than on the page. As mentioned above, economic factors have recently shifted the balance somewhat away from print publication to performance: to a medium - oral, face to face - in some aspects of which writers have been operating all their lives. Where this is the intended medium then the way poems are conceived and written is altered: for example, the struggle to make readers hear a voice becomes less urgent. Maybe it is not fanciful to portray this development as a partial recovery of that older oral tradition of working class poetry discussed earlier. It invites consideration as to how much stronger might have been the products of that earlier cultural tradition when encountered in their original contexts of performance than in the form we have them. It links with this that many recent poems work much better if their context of origin is

known - which is more often made the case in readings than in print publications.

Third - a point developed below - the importance for the writer of attempting to give shape to experience, to find a structure ~~for~~ feeling, in the making of a poem/artefact (examples would include battered women in Clout,<sup>140</sup> Ruth Shaw's 'No Rickets in Rotherham',<sup>141</sup> perhaps) should be stressed.

Finally, Blake Morrison's judgement fuels speculation about the criteria for classifying writers as 'poets'. Full-time employment in writing poetry cannot be decisive - or there would be precious few of any class. Aesthetic criteria must be in play. It would be instructive to learn what they could be that they should exclude the (literally) hundreds of working-class community-published writers who believe themselves to be engaged in making poems.

#### Language

"...the powerful influence of evil habits of speech contracted in home and street."

The Newbolt Report, 1921

"mangled vowels", "missing consonants", "uncouth provincialisms"

Language, HMSO, 1954

"At times you may not be able to understand what I say, but I have lived in Clifton, schooled in Hotwells, lived up in Horfield, and lived in Somerset, so you must forgive me for not having good English."

R W Harvey, 1976, 3

"the importance of... the FWWCP in creating a publishing culture that starts from and celebrates students' own language".

Alan Tuckett, 1985

Community-published working-class prose writing abounds in nonstandard language. As the circumstances of its presence are various some distinctions are needed in clarification.

As we have seen, many publications start as taped speech which is then transcribed and edited, collaboratively and with the full involvement of the speaker(s). Where, as very often, nonstandard dialect and/or

pronunciation is in play, these are often preserved into the written version: writing-in-nonstandard-dialect:

"We used to get a piece of iron, a bolt a iron bolt and get a piece of rope, wrap that all the way round and he did hang and we used to swing 'e. 'Course, windows did get broken. And that was called a blood knot." 142

"The teacher couldn't say they done it deliberate and the lesson'd be postponed while they got the cloth and the blotting paper to mop it up." 143

"School were lovely, yes school were grand. We used to play games in 't school yard. We had a good headmaster, he was firm but he was good " 144

"It ~~were~~ a crafty game were wool job " 145

"...the poor people never hadno bathrooms...The oven cooked the food lovely " 146

"...he was nearly locked up for making his tongue gan in the streets " 147

"I think everybody should die on them born spot " 148

"I am Lorraine, I started a new job, but make I tell you, life is not easy for I after standing till I get breaktime. And remember that I am not a person that keeping the best of health..." 149

Given working-class life as subject-matter it follows that there is much evocation of working-class speech (often displaying nonstandard features) in dialogue or within the narrative mode of entire pieces, in prose or verse - and by writers who otherwise operate in standard: nonstandard-dialect-in writing:

"Father Flanagan got to the ozzie a bit puzzled. Only feller 'e could remember called Freddie O'Toole was some geezer 'e married off three years ago 'oo give 'im the Racing and Football Outlook in a sealed envelope 'fer yer trouble, Father'. E'd never seen the heathen since." 150

"...teacha wunt lerrus  
sit next tureachother  
went shiwent aht  
cockut class cumup  
t'me  
ansed, 'AH canfaityo  
cahnt ah?'  
an ah sed eecudunt  
an ee sed ee cud  
an ah sed eecudunt  
an eeit me  
so ah itim back just

as teacha cumin  
 shipicked up that  
 stick as y' point  
 at bord'we  
 an crackt m'ovver  
 edweeit  
 an sed, 'Widontav 151  
 ooligunsere;"

"Wha happen black girl 152  
 You know here about family planning how you just ah' breed so..."

"Going back to sit with my Mum, with my basket of mangoes, she  
 smiled at me and said, 'Lucille next week dis time you we garn  
 a school'." 153

"Every year in the month of February, several acres of sugar  
 cane are cut down in the extensive plantations of the Grays Inn  
 Estate which is situated to the Eastern part of Jamaica.

'Thank Gard Crop time a com, boy no wi can get little wok fe  
 du' the men in the village saying to each other." 154

Perhaps a third (rarish) category needs adding: where a speaker's non-  
 standard and highly idiosyncratic use of language (idiolect) is preserved.  
 The outstanding example of this is Dobroyed, Leslie Wilson's account of a  
 year in Dobroyed Castle Approved School, near Todmorden:

"...the actule city of Todmorden may well of skiped and just  
 jump for joy of freedom exitemants..." 155

It follows from the foregoing that just as a new, written, medium  
 is being colonized for what is normally transacted only in speech -

"...working-class life should not just be reflected upon in the  
 pub and the front room, but should be published in the long-  
 lasting form of books, as permanent record and as a means of  
 maintaining an active local class-consciousness" 156

- so fresh territory is being claimed for nonstandard language.

This development provokes a number of comments.

First, the gains far outstrip the disadvantages. Arising from the  
 rhythms and repetitions, from the sometimes unbuttoned, comfortable  
 address there is, characteristically, an intimacy, a sense of coming un-  
 usually close to the speaker/writer, of recognising a distinctive voice:

"That's how my life was, and I used to hate it, hate it " 157

"The fight at Clifford Edwards, oh dear, oh dear, we had some fighting there. They didn't like me at all " 158

"I see Joe at the Kist - then the water came through, that was the lot. There was only one way out. All the air changed. The black damp put 30 of them to sleep, then the water rose and just covered them over. There ~~were~~ only 8 drowned and that was the 8 I left to my Flat, 6 men and 2 putters - they got the lot." 159

"Moving to a house with a proper bathroom was a dream. No more apologising for not having a fixed bath, no more having to be extra clean because you hadn't a bathroom " 160

"There's no privacy, of course, but people get used to it. If they're bit rollypoly you've to get into all the creases - and navels, you wouldn't believe the dirt in a navel. It's best if you can make them laugh, laugh with them, that is, not at them." 161

Second, the disadvantage that sometimes arises is from making insufficient allowance for the different needs of readers (eg for greater explicitness) as against listeners: for the different contexts to ~~encoun~~ter 'text' and 'utterance'. 162

Third, it becomes clear that the effectiveness of tape/transcript language is affected by the skill and tact of the original interviewer and by the processes and participants between taping and the distribution of books. It would be hard to explain otherwise the uniformly high effectiveness of the work 'midwifed' by, for example, teams including Brian Lewis (Yorkshire Art Circus) and Jane Mace (SE1 People's History/Lee Centre).

Fourth, work arising from tape/transcript seems generally more pleasurable as reading than work that starts as writing. (There are, of course, many exceptions: Evelyn Haythorne (Yorkshire Art Circus) and Bert Healey (QueenSpark) are merely the first two that come to mind). This is scarcely surprising, when one considers the unequal command as between speech and writing of most people, and especially of those with minimal experience as writers. Sometimes the difference is apparent within a single, originally part-spoken, part-written text:

for example, uncomfortable writing mingled with a relaxed fluency.

Faded Rainbow starts with an awkwardly-worded, though structurally-effective, rhetorical question:

"When one has just attained marriage status each should be extremely happy, so why was I, after only one week, feeling depressed?" 163

However, after three pages, and after a full clothes line has collapsed on to a muddy garden, bringing on a marital flare-up, the writer has relaxed and answers her own question, economically, in a sentence whose structure reflects an accumulation of grievances:

"...he took no notice of me at all during the day, too much at night, and it was an over-rated pastime and I was sorry I ever married." 164

Sometimes a gentle irony of style lurches over into heaviness:

"Opposite was the Castle public house, which during the First World War was my father's nightly sojourn...One of my many commissions was to collect empty oyster shells on Saturday... Cockerels and hens coming in to lay might be favoured with some oats and maize, indeed feeding poultry was a craft dependent on the materials which the purse could afford." (My emphases) 165

In respect of the language of John Clare "two poles of style have been identified: "the more personal", associated with "the prose usage... of those in whose society he lived"; and "the more conventionally literary", reflecting "the language of poesy, whether encountered in ballads or in formal literature (including the Bible)." 166 Community-published working-class writing is to some extent capable of a broadly similar analysis.

The preservation of features of speech into writing has not been unproblematic. Cases have occurred where authors' conditioned attitudes of shame about their nonstandard speech, as well as the broader issues of rendering speech into writing, have left authors uneasy. In the Introduction to Les Moss's Live and Learn (QueenSpark) the production 'Collective' note:



"We have found that people are always shocked when they see word-for-word transcripts of their conversations. They seem jumbled and incoherent: but that is how interesting talk goes. We talk much more like half-finished poems than polished prose."

In conversation shortly after publication Les expressed uneasiness about what he called the "babyish" quality of some of the language of the published book - a sense increased, perhaps, by the greater gap between written and nonstandard spoken, than between written and standard spoken language.

Clearly there are many complex social and linguistic factors involved in these issues. Sometimes, perhaps rather often, educated colleagues who tend to be influential in book production teams, who themselves command standard speech and writing and have come to understand the roots and nature of language variations and their differential status -tend to be positioned differently on these issues.

## Nine

Working-class writers:

the move into writing/publishing

"...each genuine recovery of forgotten experience and, with it, something of the person that once was when having the experience carries with it an element of enrichment, adds to the light of consciousness, and thus widens the conscious scope of one's life."

Colin Ward, 1978, 2

Among community-published writers there is, as suggested in discussion of the FWWCP above, considerable variety: of educational experience (from graduates to adult literacy students); of age and experience (from those born in the nineteenth century to those still at school); of culture and ethnicity. The great preponderance are working-class women and men and either first-time writers or already able to write, developing a new sense of the uses and potential of writing. Such writers, typically after years as minimal writers only (eg, using writing for letters, shopping lists and form-filling) have come to write often, in new ways, with new purposes and for new readerships, to regard writing as an important part of their lives - and to publish what they write. It is on such writers that this section of the study seeks to concentrate.

In what follows I seek to argue (1) that the move into such new writing/publishing is of the profoundest importance to the writers involved; and (2) that the processes involved in community publishing are both of great potential interest to educationists (especially those interested - and often frustrated - in the development of writing and writers) and a recovery and reanimation of a tradition of working-class collective self-education. The first argument emphasises the value of experience of the processes of community-publishing to writers as individuals; the second that of collaborativeness.

#### Writing, culture and the individual

"More than any other single invention, writing has transformed human consciousness."

(Ong, W, 1982, 78)

"...anyone who does not write loses both power and potential, comparable to losing a limb or sight or hearing."

(F Smith, 1982,11)

A body of important work - disparate in that it includes contributions from, for example, linguists, literary theorists, educators and anthropologists, and recent in that it is chiefly of the 1970s and 1980s - has considerably developed understanding of the nature of writing and print, the distinctions and relationships between speech (orality) and writing (literacy) and the effects on cultures and individuals of the repertoire addition involved in the move into the latter. (It needs stressing that it is never a case of literacy replacing orality, but rather of its supervening upon it). From this work, alongside some triviality and labouring of the obvious, important insights emerge. The following suggests some of them.

In contrast with both speech and with average reading speeds (Smith, 1982, 21-22; Ong, 1982, 40) writing, a technology involving equipment, is painfully slow. Writing is hard work for most of us - although the natures of various kinds of writing, purpose, context, target readership etc are factors that necessarily complicate and qualify such a generalisation. That writing involves a secondary level of representation of the world - at a level of abstraction beyond speech (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978); that writing is a lonely, in fact solipsistic operation involving the attempt to enable the reader to take "speaker's meaning" - i.e. "what was meant or intended" (Olson, 1977; Olson & Torrance, 1981, 235) - from free-standing 'text': without the aid of the paralinguistic cues, 'feedback' mechanisms etc built into interactive, face-to-face speech contexts; <sup>1</sup> that sustained writing involves physical discomfort in ways that sustained talking/listening tend not to - all these are considerations that go some way to explaining this.

Competent writing involves formidable feats of 'decentration' (Moffett, 1968, after Piaget): it depends on and promotes the ability to imagine

and cater for the needs of absent readers, some unknown and/or remote in time and space, so as to produce monologic, autonomous, ideational 'text' (as opposed to dialogic, directly interpersonal, context-dependent "utterance"/"outerance" (Olson, 1977; Olson & Torrance, 1981).

With the author absent and unavailable for explanation and justification, written language must be "self-sufficient" (Smith, 1982, 71).

In both its communicative role and "as an archival form...for the preservation of significant meanings across generations" (Olson, 1980, 186) writing potentially transcends time and space - yet flexibility rather than a more often emphasized permanence is, in respect of pre-published writing, a more crucial attribute. (Paradoxically, speech while physically evanescent can be psychologically ineradicable (Smith, 1982, 70; Ong, 1982).) Writing admits of deliberate, detailed planning whereas spontaneous orality does not; it typically allows and undergoes revision, editing, polishing; it produces outcomes of thinking for unhurried scrutiny not least by the writer - and such outcomes may be read repeatedly, at various speeds, in any order (Oxenham, 1980, 132). Writing, by virtue of the 'rights' and benefits it normally confers - such as those cited, of review, time for reflection, reshaping, multiple drafting - involves, correspondingly, more 'responsibilities' and costs than speech: once 'published' it is unchanging (Ong, 1982, 79) and the writer may reasonably be held to account:

"...the person who writes stands up to be shot."

(Jacques Barzun, in Hendrix, 1981, 70)

Because of such attributes, the human invention of the technology of writing - on the strongest view - actually enhances human potential, inaugurating potent cultural achievements such as categorical, analytic,

context-independent, abstract thought (as opposed to a limited descriptivity and formulaic aggregativity (Ong, 1982) to which the 'mindset' of orality is said to be confined); adding space/time distance to proximity in language interaction and a "theoretic" to an "empiric" mode of reasoning (Scribner & Cole in Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981, 92). Writing enables the organisation of experience into systematic knowledge: a new sense of knowledge as "incremental" rather than constant, fixed, static (Cook-Gumperz & Gumperz, 1981, 92); it enables the development of further potent technologies. By means of the new analytical procedures it makes possible, writing heralds a new reflexivity (eg Oxenham, 1970, 42), inwardness, interiority, introspectiveness. In Frank Smith's terms:

"...by writing we find out what we know, what we think. Writing is an extremely efficient way of gaining access to that knowledge that we cannot explore directly."

(F Smith, 1982, 33)

"The quantum leap from speech to script" in a literal sense separates the knower from the known (Smith, 1982, 15; Ong, 1982, 44, 46, 105, 114); it potentially frees the mind of low level tasks - for example of memorization (Ong, 1982, 41; Descartes, 1911/1968, 19-20, 63-65, cited in Olson & Torrance, 1981, 250). Writing is "the most momentous of all human technological inventions" (Ong, 1982, 85); it is "essentially a consciousness-raising activity" (Ong, 1982, 151); it penetrates and transforms the human psyche (Ong, 1982, 14) and reshapes the very characteristic of thought.

This strongest view, for all its heady intellectual excitement, is perhaps too speculative; its claims are untested and perhaps untestable; it is longer on assertion than evidence. Brian Street (1984, 19-65; 1985, 10-16) has challenged versions that assume a "neutral", "technical" character for literacy and claims for its capacity actually to instal critical, even "logical" functions where none existed before. These are characterised as constituting a (dubious) "autonomous model" of literacy whose pro-

ponents, Street suggests, fail to understand the logic of oralities within cultures different from their own and make unsupported assumptions of the superiorities of their own particular (eg academic) versions of literacy.

It is clear that some of the achievements of pre-literate cultures imply hypothetico-predictive thinking - and perhaps some of the conclusions cited "relate to primitivism rather than to orality". Again, a version stressing unidirectional influence - even determinism - of technology on human thinking seems far less satisfactory than an account stressing interaction: technologies arise out of extant needs and tendencies, in this case presumably pre-existing tendencies towards the analytic, categorical, introspective, subordinating (as opposed to concatenated), the distanced and the abstract. In the present state of knowledge, therefore, a weaker version of the cognitive-transformational effects of beginning writing - an explanation that further explores priority, necessity and sufficiency - seems more tenable. Scribner and Cole, from their work among the Vai people of North West Liberia, argue for a less "monolithic model of what writing is and what it leads to": that writing may promote "specific language processing and cognitive skills" rather than "improved general mental abilities." What we have are "starting points for a theory of the intellectual consequences of reading and writing (which) do not warrant the status of conclusions" (in Whiteman, M F (ed), 1981, 86, 84, 86). (David Olson, in taking up these issues, insists that as a starting point "written language and literacy cannot be treated as homogeneous" - Olson, D, 1980, 188).

#### Writing, publishing and class

What must, of course, be added even to modified claims as to the cultural potencies of writing and print is recognition of the class asymmetries bound up with them. Brian Street, from his critique of

"autonomous" models of literacy, has proposed instead an "ideological" model: that we need to view literary practices **always** within particular social and ideological formations. As example Street refers to work (Clanchy, 1979) showing how

"Norman conquerors deliberately fostered a 'literate mentality'...

As newcomers they could not establish claim to land through local custom and practice, folk memory or indigenous symbols, as the natives did, so they made land rights dependent on written documentation, which they could control." (Street, 1985, 12)

Viewed from such a perspective, Street suggests, the techniques of teaching literacy have typically been "forms of hegemony" (ibid).

Raymond Williams (eg 1981a, Ch 4) has shown how as the power of writing and print (dominated by the powerful few) has been decisive, so the cultural status of orality has declined, further depressing that of the many who are limited to it. Historically, meanings made in writing and print have belonged to other than working-class people; access to writing (characterised by Raymond Williams as a "separable material system of signification" - 1981a, 90) is discontinuous with orality in the sense of being "wholly dependent on forms of specialized training" - access to which has been and remains culturally differentiated, thus reproducing asymmetrical class relations between social groups here constituted as producers and consumers, participants and spectators; indeed, the formation and uses of writing and reading in our culture have been developed to the advantage of the powerful and in the interests of cultural hegemony (as evidence cited later underlines) and both writing and written forms themselves have become strongly inflected towards the cultural assumptions, language and projects of those controlling them.

Of a piece with this is Vygotsky's stress on the necessary social embeddedness of writing (Vygotsky, 1978, Ch 8) and his insistence on keeping central to any teaching of writing its inescapably social relations and contexts of use.



However evaluated, the effects of dawning literacy are observable in whole cultures as they develop writing (Goody & Watt, 1968); in individuals becoming literate (Luria, 1976); and, shadowily, in illiterates interacting with those whose literacy has to some degree restructured their basic orality: those in contact with others' language that is "tempered by the written word" (Cook-Gumperz, 1981, 106): with speech that, under the influence of writing, has become "Sparsely linear or analytic" (Ong, 1982, 40).

The move into print intensifies the processes (eg Oxenham, 1980, 53) and magnifies the power associated with the move into writing: for example, the reification of words; the objectification of language; the sense of autonomous, closed, definitive, completed text (even the vestigial sense of dialogue preserved in the marginalia of manuscripts disappears - Ong, 1982, 132); and ultimately, "intertextuality" (Ong, 1982, 133ff). Print introduces the solitary reader (compare the communal reading aloud of scarce early mss books - Ong, 1982, 131), paralleling the typically solitary writer, trading isolation against the hope of addressing a community of readers beyond the imagining of primary orality. In inaugurating the private ownership of words (Ong, 1982, 31) - with entailed notions of plagiarism and copyright - and the production of dictionaries, print shifts the text to a yet-further remove from both the author and any orality-type interactive context and precipitates the shift towards language standardization. Word-processors further intensify the processes of writing/print, adding, for example, the possibility of relatively effortless revision and duplication of written text.

#### Working-class writers and 'secondary literacy'

Consideration of the experiences of some twenty working-class writers (by interview, correspondence and a trawl of publications) indicates that ~~what the foregoing~~ suggests about cultures and individuals moving

from illiteracy to literacy and about the cultural positioning of working-class people in relation to writing and print provides parallels and offers a framework for enquiry and hypothesis about those experiences within community-publishing processes since 1971. While some community-published writers (eg adult literacy students) are indeed developing 'primary' literacy, those investigated can be seen as making the move from an established 'primary', but broadly speaking 'passive', dormant, nominal, provisional literacy (the legacy of minimal and often unpropitious education) into a qualitatively different 'secondary' and 'active' literacy - as well as into print. Moves into such a 'secondary', reconstructed

literacy - to writing regularly and habitually in new ways, with new purposes, for new readerships and for publication - involve, arguably, a development and intensification of those processes attendant on the primary move into writing discussed above. On the basis of the testimony of the writers studied the shifts they have made involve various kinds of 'benefits': personal gains of skill and autonomy interacting with social gains of confidence and inter-personal effectiveness - as well, perhaps, as some problems, 'costs' and 'losses' - both in terms of dis-location of previously settled patterns of life and relationship and, more elusively, in terms of those feelings of inadequacy and loss commonly reported by those undergoing new learning:

2

"to get noledge is to naw wer ignerent".

Meshed with such benefits as sketched above have been novel experiences of control, resistance and self-representation: a small-scale undermining of, rather than a frontal assault upon, the dominant, hegemonic practices and relations of meaning-making in our culture; a challenge to taken-for-granted divisions of labour within the total processes of book production and to naturalised connections between publishing and profit. What emerges in respect of writers coming to develop range, skill and confidence

to formulate, refine, store and amplify meanings - to inform, persuade and demand - lends justification to the fears of those who have sought to reserve to themselves full access to writing and publishing. The point made by Raymond Williams about reading (Williams, 1981a, 110) may be extrapolated to writing:

"... the potentials of the technology were never wholly controllable. There was no way to teach a man to read the Bible - a predominant intention in much early education in literacy - which did not also enable him to read the radical press. And this press was there to be read because under a range of pressures from open repression to financial disadvantage some men took initiatives to use the technology for their own as opposed to the dominant social purposes."

#### Experience into Knowledge

"Putting our ideas into words, or better writing them down, makes an important difference. For in this way they become criticisable. Before this they were part of ourselves... Thus there is at least one important sense of 'knowledge' - the sense of 'linguistically formulated theories submitted to criticism.'"

Sir Karl Popper, 1971, 10

"All genuine knowledge originates in direct experience."

3

Mao Tse Tung

"...through seeking each time only to write another book, I eased myself into knowledge. To write was always to learn. Beginning a book, I always felt I was in possession of all the facts about myself; at the end I was always surprised."

V S Naipaul, 'Prologue to an Autobiography'  
(Sunday Times, 8 May, 1983, 34)

The word 'experience' has occurred many times in this study:

writers have been characterised as recording, narrating, giving shape to - and in many instances sifting and explicitly analysing - their 'experiences'. That is to say, they have been seen as paying special sorts of attention to their 'experiences' as opposed to merely undergoing them, as in effect coming to view their experiences as 'experiments'. They have, in "going over past experience to see what it yields" (John Dewey) and by giving experience an externalised

form, made it available for inspection, by themselves as by others. By freeing 'experience' - itself a problematic notion in relation to the language and processes in and by which it is formulated<sup>5</sup> - from the particularity and limitations of its contexts, by inducing the abstraction, selection, generalisation that any exposition of 'experience' entails, they have arguably transformed it into 'knowledge'. The formulational processes entailed are of the deepest importance - especially if we bear in mind "the Kantian thesis that while all knowledge may come through experience it does not necessarily come from experience" (Hamlyn, D W, 1978, 37). Put another way:

"In order to learn from experience, students need the chance both to take part actively and to stand back, question and reflect, in order to understand what is happening."

(Dixon & Stratta, 1984)

Arguably, perhaps logically - although scarcely provably - the experience of making explicit what normally remains implicit, of giving written form to experience, involves, for those with scant experience of attempting it, processes of considerable cognitive potential:<sup>6</sup>

"If it is the function of a piece of writing to question an idea or explore an issue, it is reasonable to assume that this kind of writing would promote the kind of cognitive activity required for critical questioning"

(Whiteman, M F, 1981, 4)

"It is reasonable to think that the progressive interrelationship between experience and understanding may lead to an increasing ability to think in a way relatively independent of experience, and even to revise one's view of experience in terms of that way of thinking."

(Hamlyn, D W, 1978, 119)

This process of making knowledge out of the ordering of experience, of making 'focal' (in Polanyi's terms) what has hitherto remained 'subsidiary',<sup>7</sup> is what by now scores of community-published, working-class writers are seen as engaged in. In reflecting on writing and the shift into writing a number have come to portray what amount to just such

transformations of experience into knowledge as well as the transformational processes entailed.

8

Ron Barnes (Centerprise), reflects on his motivation to write

A Licence to Live:

"I realized there was something wrong with life - or with me. I tried to find out by writing."

(Conversation, 1978)

Of the outcome he comments:

"For years I'd had that feeling of confusion: that nothing had been planned, that life had just gone on. And by writing that it gave me some sort of perspective: you could see back as clear as you'd ever see back."

(Interview, 1980)

Toby<sup>9</sup> (Bristol Broadside), out of the process of producing his autobiography, moves towards an understanding of what determined his lifelong experience as tramp and social outsider - and inductively to the general truth it exemplifies:

"As a young man on the road people said: 'Why don't you get married? Why haven't you?' Now I couldn't have given them the answers then; but I think I can now. It's psychological: from a boy to a man I was tied, which was unnatural." (As the eldest son of a poor widower who had become paralysed, Toby was kept home from school to attend (precociously) to his father's every need). "And when I think of marriage that's another tie - perhaps not so bad as the other form - but I've got an idea that's why I've never, ever - because it's another tie... If you've got a young mind, a growing child, what's put in that mind is there, isn't it... It won't change, not in basic things."

(Interview, 1981)

10

Julia Young, from reflecting, again in the process of writing autobiographically, on her late father's life, achieves a fresh insight:

"It's strange, but now, twenty years on, I have a little understanding of what he was going through. He saw his lot as a lifetime of being misunderstood, of never being able to prove your worth, of having people around you who keep pulling you back. He died in loneliness years before he stopped breathing because his family didn't have the intelligence to understand. I feel like that. In that sense he lives through me."

(Julia Young, 1984, 14)

Of the discovery of processing experience in poetry the same writer comments:

"I don't know why I started to take poetry seriously. One day it seemed to be there, something like a voice in your head. From then on I began to see things differently. It was as if I'd opened my eyes ~~for~~ the first time." (My emphasis) (20)

In a group discussion taped for me, a member of East Bowling History Workshop hints at a process through which experience has become contextualised and reordered, perhaps - given 1930s/1980s parallels - for new kinds of use (see discussion of 'nostalgia' above):

"Now they (our family experiences during the Depression) have come into perspective...Then it was a piece of useless information - didn't mean a thing; now I've got it into perspective."

Pat, new to frequent writing as a form of life, reports a fresh 'focal', metalinguistic awareness.

"...for the first time I find myself noticing words and the way people use them."

#### Understanding writing and the writing process

New experiences of the writing process have conferred fresh insights - new knowledge - of both that process and of the nature and potential power of writing itself.

Old assumptions are overturned - about, for example, revision:

"Then I think 'No, that's not right' so I change it and then I think of something else and add it on. People write on a piece of paper and then read it back to themselves - go over the spelling and go over the punctuation. Then you've got a piece that's readable. I've discovered that this is normal practice. I've always thought that it was just a bad habit of mine to go over re-correct and scrub out "; (My emphasis)

and about spelling: its proper place at the 'proof-reading' stage of writing and the actual consequence for writers and writing of  
11  
imperfect command of the system:

"I went round a word like enormous -  
I would write big.  
As soon as I stopped bothering  
I were off."

(Kevin, Write First Time)

#### " A Way Out

It was late at night  
when I realised  
I should have left a note for the milkman  
for two loaves for the children's dinners  
the next day at school.

The trouble was  
 I could not spell loaves,  
 and as my husband was asleep  
 I had to write the note on my own.  
 After four attempts  
 it went as follows.  
 'Milkman. Can you leave me a cut loaf. Thank you.  
 P S Make that two'."

(Write First Time)

12

Doris White (Oakleaf Books, Milton Keynes):

"I have learned...how to constantly use my dictionary. To check  
 the written word again and again..."

(Letter, 1982)

Fresh characterizations of writing are achieved -

"It's very hard to have that conversation with yourself, which  
 is what you have to do if you are writing alone " -

(Anna, Write First Time)

and new understandings about style and register -

"A lot of people lose what they want to say - they learn to write  
 in a certain way and then lose what they are saying. When we  
 were doing 'Write First Time', there was this country lad talking  
 about when he was a young lad and he set fire to a barn and he  
 said 'and then we hoofed it!' But when he wrote it down he said  
 'We ran away', and it lost the feeling completely. It was nothing.  
 But when it was in dialect, it was very entertaining. But if he  
 was writing for a job and he said 'We hoofed it', he wouldn't  
 get the job "

(Trevor, Write First Time)

"But when you go for a job it's different, you put on a tie, so  
 you write in a different style."

(Bob, Write First Time)

New realisations are gained about the communicative potential of  
 writing

"You can send writing all over the place. If its spoken only  
 one person hears it at a time, if it's written lots of people  
 hear it "

(Juliet, Write First Time)

about its heuristic function:

"In writing I can formulate my ideas and even find out answers  
 to things I didn't know before "

(Roger Mills,<sup>13</sup> Hackney Writers' Workshop, 1977, 60)

and about its potential for enlarging consciousness:

"If I didn't write I don't think I'd have a view of the world nor the end of our street."

14

(Joe Smythe, Letter, 1980)

The potency and prestige of literacy as against orality has been brought

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home to writers in many ways. Jimmy McGovern (Scotland Road, Liverpool)

has put this vividly:

"I used to pack in jobs or I used to get the sack. So quite a lot of the time I ended up signing on the dole. On the dole you'd go down there and sign on and you'd get treated like muck. They just couldn't give a damn about you. And in this kind of face to face confrontation I was always the loser. And we all were you know, all these people going down there. And you'd see them seething at the rail, you know the sort of wire fence - and there were clerks on that side and us on this side. And they'd say anything they wanted to us and just walk away. And they'd leave big heavy men actually seething to get over there and plant somebody for what they'd said. And of course they couldn't do it - and if they tried anyway they just phoned the police. And there was this vision of authority being very articulate, knowing all the rules and always coming out on top - and us losing. It happened to me a few times. And I thought sod this, so I went home once and I wrote this lovely letter, at length you know, something like a sixteen page letter, protesting about the way I'd been treated over a certain case...Anyway, lo and behold this chap writes back who was the kingpin of the dole and gives me a private interview apologising for the way I'd been treated...I think they must have said to themselves, oh my God, this person can sit down and write a letter, he can cause a spot of bother." (My emphasis)

(Interview, 1980)

#### Writing, Understanding, Feeling - and 'therapy'

Several writers in reflecting on their writing have stressed benefits in terms of understanding: of the external world and of themselves.

Jennifer Wallace writes:

"Sometimes I wrote to relieve boredom, having been unemployed for years and sometimes because it helped to sort things out." (My emphasis)

(Hackney Women Writers, 1984, 91)

Bill, in a formulation akin to Suzanne Langer's theory of literature as giving form to feeling (Langer, S, 1953), puts it thus:

"Why I write is to put my feelings on paper,  
 -- to put what I feel down.  
 I feel as if it helps to discover myself." (My emphasis)

(Write First Time, 1978, 143)



Toby, reflecting on the production of his autobiography, comments:

"Strange to say, but since the publication of that...I've sort of gone ahead more. A wonderful feeling. I've reached what I call clarity of mind."

(Interview, 1981)

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Evelyn Haythorne remarks of her writing experience before she wrote

On Earth to Make the Numbers Up:

"...if I was full of worry I would sit and write it all down as a sort of therapy."

Pat:

"To me (writing) can work as therapy. Where some people can bare their soul to another person I can't, but by writing down how I feel enables me to put my thoughts and feelings in the right order. Whereas before (coming to write a lot) I had a tendency to keep pushing them aside leaving myself with feelings of guilt..."

Toby's comment (above), as do some of Ron Barnes's, imply a spin-off therapeutic function. Fred Williams (Hackney) portrayed the release aspects of writing in his 'Liberty Pen' at an NUM benefit (August, 1984); and Joe Smythe has referred (rather neatly) to his sometimes use of writing poetry as a "getaway vehicle" (Letter, 1980). Clearly the practice of using writing privately in an attempt to sort things out, 17 solve problems, unburden oneself and thus feel better, must be widespread. However, that community-published writing should be classified as 'therapy' - and therefore dismissed, patronised, marginalised, removed from serious consideration - has always been vigorously resisted by working-class writing and community-publishing groups. In 1979, within the FWWCP/ACGB struggle over funding referred to above, Charles Osborne (ACGB) is reported as remarking of community-published writing:

"One could see it was useful from a therapeutic point of view, 18 perhaps, and maybe in general social terms, community terms..."

More recently (Bulletin No 71) the ACGB, in discussing the arts and disability, has asserted:

"...a clear distinction can be made between the use of the arts as therapy on the one hand, and providing the opportunity for disabled people to have access to professional artists and artistic experience on the other."

(On this Naseem Khan (New Statesman, 1 March, 1985, 36) comments:

"It (the line between art and therapy) is not a line I would like to police..."

Three points need to be made. First, there seems little doubt that there is therapeutic intention on the part of the organisers of some projects outside the field under consideration but not entirely remote from it, and therapeutic outcome for participants in many writing projects. The former category was explored as part of an exciting conference run jointly by the Oral History Society and the British Society of Gerontology (November, 1981)<sup>19</sup> and is evident in a paper on work at Stone House Hospital, Dartford,<sup>20</sup> and in such developments as the Art and Therapy Co-operative, Dalston, E 8.<sup>21</sup>

Second, much turns on distinguishing between acknowledging the by-product outcomes for writers, on the one hand, and giving appropriately serious attention, on the other, to texts in the context of the processes and social formations that produce them. Olive Rogers is surely<sup>right</sup> to point out the danger of failure to make that distinction:

"Once we are seen as therapy, we do I feel lose credibility as serious writers..."

(FWWCP Report, August, 1982)

Third, attention needs to be given, perhaps, to the meanings attached to the word 'therapy'. At root the term refers to healing: medical, curative treatment of disease. Arguably, there is commonly a spectrum of use: from a dignified sense (1) of restoration, resurgence of vitality, renewal and recovered usefulness (eg of stroke victims) - healing, in fact - to (2) overtones of soothing, smoothing down, pacification - of coping with the apparently unalterable.

(Something of this distinction was caught in a now-and-then reminiscence -

FWWCP AGM, 1980 -

"They used to give medicine, now they give drugs.")

If the 'disease' in contemplation is seen as socio-political - characterised by a collective lack of confidence in class, class language and cultural experience and unequal access to writing and print, let alone radio, television and film - then 'therapy' in sense (1), as healing, would be a less inappropriate label for some aspects of some community-publishing projects.

#### Writing, publishing and social gains

Joan (Islington) writes:

"Writing and publishing my second book means I am taking part in a world that I previously felt left out of - 'Left in the Dark' so to speak."

(Eden Grove Women's Writing Group, 1984, 10)

In the same book Winny writes:

"I have taken part in writing 2 books...It means a lot to my life in several different ways. I am more highly thought of amongst my family, at work and amongst my friends... It is helping to develop my intelligence..." (45)

Growth of confidence through writing, publishing and attendant activities is a constant theme of worker writers reflecting on their recent experiences:

"...it has also bolstered up my confidence a little and I find I can talk to people better, where at one time if someone spoke better English than me - posh we call it down here - I was very conscious of my Yorkshire accent..."

(Evelyn Haythorne, Letter, 1982)

Ron Barnes speaks of a new-found confidence, for example in confronting housing officials:

"It was because I'd become aware of the unfairness...At one time I wouldn't say boo to a mouse...When I saw that we had to live in them conditions I had the courage, I suppose, to stand up and say well no, this is it. I'm not standing for it."

(Interview, 1980)

Looking back with newly-achieved confidence and insight Kevin comments:

"...most working people, in fact most people, feel they are not important...If all the people realised the ability they really

have inside, really respected themselves the way they should and were proud of themselves the way they could be, then there would be all sorts of problems for the people who run our society."

(Write First Time, 1978, 54, 57)

Discovery of abilities possessed, renewed self-respect and sense of status are pervasive themes. Evelyn Hanslip (East Bowling History Workshop) has referred to her astonishment at finding herself speaking in public, "printing the paper" (East Bowling News), appearing on ATV and, tellingly, a new-found capacity to insist:

"on the day when we had arranged an evening party for launching AGateway to Education we were told (on enquiring at the printer's) that we could not have it till the day after! I never knew I was capable of talking as I did then..."

22

For Daisy Noakes (QueenSpark, Brighton) her inclusion in a FWWCP group to tour the U S A it seemed would "really be the peak"; yet perhaps more 'travelling' is represented in a vignette (that might be entitled 'Ovendean Revisited') of presenting school prizes and making the first speech of her life (sharing the platform with Dame Flora Robson, the Mayoress of Brighton and others) at the very establishment where she had worked as a maid over half a century earlier. For her, most significant of all was freedom to enter by the front door for the first time:

"I said I hoped they would all achieve their ambitions but I hoped doesn't take them as long as it did me to get from the back door to the front door."

Julia Benson Young has moved, through writing and publishing, from being wife and mother only to being in addition a leading light in organising the Doncaster Festival of Poetry and Folk Music - which has involved a confrontation with "a big white chief in the Education Department" (Benson Young, 1984, 25-26) and overcoming surprising cultural inhibitions:

"There's a Chinese near the centre," he said, 'Fancy a meal?' I didn't really because you see I'd never 'eaten out' before. In fact I couldn't remember the last time I'd sat at the table with a man, and that included Tony (her miner husband). He usually sat down as I hovered making and passing things." (30)

Evelyn Haythorne writes:

"Since my book was published I have been on Yorkshire TV three times and all local radio stations, besides Radio Four. The Doncaster Arts Cooperative have done three plays from the book which have toured South Yorkshire in pubs and clubs, schools etc., which was very

thrilling for me...the biggest thrill to come out of it was when several libraries bought the book. Me on a library shelf!"

(Letter, 1982)

Ron Barnes:

"The people in Centerprise called it a manuscript. A rather fancy name I thought for such a jumbled effort. But the word did seem to give me a bit of an uplift, and lessened my self consciousness about it. Licence to Live was in the window of Centerprise some months after. I of course felt wonderful. I couldn't believe my eyes. I just couldn't resist the temptation to glance at the window and see my book and this great display every time I passed the shop in my taxi."

(Interview, 1980)

Roger Mills:

"...when I first started writing it was the only time that anyone had actually listened to anything I had said: because I had written it down."

(Interview, 1983)

In their reflections on recent forays into writing and publishing writers have spoken excitedly of their new-found discovery of the differential status of writing as opposed to speech and of access to and control of powerful publishing processes -

"The thing is that you're in control of the whole process"

(Glyn and Trevor, Write First Time, 1978, 42)

- and, in terms reminiscent of Paulo Freire, of the feeling that they are taking charge of their lives. Community-publishing has led to a range of interesting spin-off activities. A surprising number of writers (including, coincidentally, all those I have interviewed or corresponded with) have by now appeared on television or radio (signalling their newsworthiness and paralleling the experience of working-class writers in the 'Second Moment'); local newspaper coverage has become commonplace.

But most important of all, perhaps, has been a commitment to writing itself:

"a day without writing something was a day wasted."

(Joe Smythe, Interview, 1980)

#### Others' reactions to what is published

Predominantly, 'first-time' community-published writers report warm,

encouraging reactions on the part of readers. Barry Heath, a Mansfield ex-miner, wrote a play about his upbringing (based on an earlier book of poems-in-dialect)<sup>23</sup> and 25 relatives attended the first night at the Nottingham Playhouse (May, 1985). According to the Mansfield and North Nottinghamshire Chronicle and Advertiser (6 June, 1985, 63)

"The verdict of the family after the show was: 'It was a strange experience to see your own family brought to life - we never realised we seemed so funny. We were very moved by the play - it was so hilarious, so nostalgic and so moving - we are all very proud of our brother.'"

Roger Mills:

"My parents have really liked A Comprehensive Education. They didn't have any criticisms, which I was amazed at. They've taken an interest in writing. Though I must admit there are certain little short stories, etc. that may be full of swearing, which I've not kept from them, but which I've not brought to their attention."

(Interview, 1983)

Ron Barnes:

"...people that have liked it, they've said, 'good book, Ron'... Distant relatives who I had not seen for years phoned to congratulate me. They felt sure I was on my way to fame and fortune. 'We hope so, especially the fortune bit'."

(Interview, 1980)

Joe Smythe:

"...somebody (she's a shop steward in the factory where she works) said it was real grassroots stuff. That was a nice thing to hear."

(Interview, 1980)

Writers up and down the country (eg Arthur Newton, Centerprise; several at QueenSpark, Brighton) have received friendly letters, characteristically contributing further reminiscences and comment. (See, eg, QueenSpark (community newspaper) Nos 19 (3), 21 (3), 22(6), 27 (2) 30(4).

However, naturally enough, reactions have not been unmixd and many writers have known the pain as well as the pleasure of publication.

Rón Barnes:

"One particular thing he (a reviewer) said - I mentioned butter - 'He makes butter a creamy commodity'."

(Interview, 1980)

Doris White (D for Doris, V for Victory, Oakleaf Books, Milton Keynes)

describes the "bad part" of her (exuberant) book (about life, including work in the LMS factory, at Wolverton during World War II) as

"letters in the press by local residents stating I had something wrong. One stating that I was laughing and drinking while our boys were being killed, another that I knew nothing of Auschwitz etc. That was really hurtful..."

(Letter, 1982)

Of his second book - moving from autobiography to include stories of the wider family - Ron Barnes writes

"Coronation Cups and Jam Jars ...unfortunately had quite an adverse effect on some of my relatives. I had gone a bit too far, relating to things that were an embarrassment to the family. I had spoken about things that should never have been mentioned, in or outside the family. 'In print as well, what a disgrace'."

(Interview, 1980)

#### Other's reactions to the move into writing/publication

Discussing the experience of late nineteenth century "working-class intellectuals" Sheila Rowbotham (1981, 79) has written of their being

"forced apart from working-class men and women, few of whom could share such new and alien interests...The working-class intellectual's new self was necessarily fragmented."

(See also Vincent, D, 1981, Ch 8) Within recent initiatives working-class people becoming (published) writers have experienced problems resembling those of their forerunners in 'Moments' I and II:

"...when I tried to write at home the family used to laugh at me. My scribbling as it was known by them was a family joke."

(Evelyn Haythorne, Letter, 1981)

Julia Benson Young reports a spectrum of reactions - from the painful to the hilarious:

"Many of my so-called friends also abandoned me at this point, though some stayed on...The family stopped indulging what they called 'my little hobby' and got down to the serious business of ignoring me... The family couldn't see what going to college and writing poems had to do with being a wife and mother...They told me quite clearly that if I went (to a week's residential course at Northern College) they would wash their hands of me. The year I went on that course no one sent me a birthday card or Christmas present..."

...It was at this time that I collided with Mrs Brittan as she

came out of Rossington Co-op and got another perspective on poetry. 'Hello love', she said. She speaks with a really loud voice. 'Your Val's been telling me you're writing poetry.' Then, bending closer, 'Eh lass, you want to be careful, they reckon those poets are sex mad and too much of the other sends you barmy. They all end up in the nut house. You know they bloody do, mark my words...

...He had bought a copy of the anthology...I was intrigued when he said he would like to discuss my work further with me, so could he take me home...On the way home we talked about the book and poetry in general but, on stopping the car a few doors from my house, he turned, gave me a straight look, and said, 'Can I screw you? I've never had it with a poet before.'  
 Bloody hell, I thought, but since it had been a sophisticated evening I kept my cool and said, 'And what makes you think you can have it with one now?'  
 'This'. He read with difficulty. Attlee Avenue isn't well lit.  
 'Women are liberated.  
 Can I make love to you?  
 Women are liberated  
 Let me make love to you.'"

(Julia Benson Young, 1984, 23; 32, 24, 28)

Roger Mills points to the vulnerability of the published writer

(compare Jacques Barzun's comment above) -

"...you're laying yourself on the line, really: you're talking about **your** personal feelings that you might have had about an incident, when other people might've been involved in the same incident. You might not have revealed those feelings at the time; like some incident when you might have been really scared - at the time you wouldn't have revealed that to your friends. Then you've written this book and you state that you thought this or that; so you're laying your personal feelings open far more than you would in a conversation. Or even if you did in a conversation you've not actually got it printed in bloody black and white. Also, if you've written something it becomes public property, really. If I write, if I state some opinion or something, they've then got the right to come up to you and say, 'What's this you say here? I think you're totally wrong.'  
 You've laid yourself open far more than if you'd just said it in a pub. If you've said it in print it is open for anyone to come up to you and say 'Justify this' -

also to the problem of imagined reactions:

"To put it crudely, I think people think 'Oh, who does he think he is?!...I must reckon myself quite a bit to write stories and that, and you've still got the attitude that only people with a university education, or are already famous, write."

(Interview, 1983)

Finally, as we have seen with their counterparts in the earlier



'moments', the writers under consideration have experienced difficulty incorporating their writing activity into the routines of working-class life.

Ron Barnes:

"I had much to do and spent every minute in my cab grudgingly, seven days a week seven hours or more a day, sometimes evenings and weekends. I began to take wrong roads, passengers started complaining. Instead of thinking of my passenger I was thinking about my next poem or painting, or the next book I wanted to read, or the next newspaper."

(Interview, 1980)

Joe Smythe, given a unique three-month sabbatical by the N U R to write a book of poems to mark the 150th anniversary of the Liverpool/Manchester railway, wrote through the night in his council house while his wife and children slept.

So strong is the association between being published and doing well out of it that it has not been unknown for published 'first-time' writers and those close to them to misconstrue their situations and financial prospects as writers.

Ten

Working-class writers, community-publishing and education

### Participation in processes

"...the 'Working Lives' project changed the people who did it".

(Ken Worpole, 1977, 11)

Within the foregoing testimony is inscribed a sense of impressive gains - personal, social and, perhaps, cognitive - and some inevitable difficulties and disorientations. They are ~~seen as~~ arising from moves into writing and publication and underline the intrinsic value and problems ~~associated~~ with such moves. Such outcomes are not of course peculiar to community-published, first-time working-class **writers**; for example, on the negative side Jane Austen was ribbed by her family for her 'scribbling'; Thomas Hardy, like countless writers savaged by critics, suffered keenly in the case of Jude the Obscure. What does emerge as of peculiar significance - where writing and writers arise from group endeavours - is the sense these writers convey of the crucial importance to them of participation in all the processes and collectivity essential to community publishing.

Some sense of the 'core' collaborative publishing activities emerges: of participants meeting (at venues ranging from individual homes to reclaimed huts to community centres) to read their work to each other, with discussion following; taping/transcribing; selection/editing - involving decisions about form, language etc; decision-making about format, layout: paste-ups; decisions about cost, printing processes, print-runs, publicity, distribution, sales...Around these are clusters of related activities, home and away.

At home there will be correspondence/FWWCP business to be addressed: perhaps the agenda of a forthcoming AGM and Conference to consider, proposals for a 'workshop' to be developed; or attention given to developing a case (or a group development plan) in respect of application for funding, perhaps to a Regional Arts Association or the ACGB. The latest FWWCP Executive minutes may have come in, perhaps stimulating

the group to express a view on whether Voices should accept for publication material with racist/sexist connotation yet working-class authorship. Participation may be planned in a campaign to resist a local school closure or local authority spending cuts. Plans are to be finalised for a book launch or a public reading or staffing an FWWCP bookstall at a local conference.

'Away' are public performances: in community centres, pubs, schools, workers' clubs - at benefit nights (eg during the Miner's Strike, 1984-1985). Beyond this there is attendance at conferences (FWWCP AGM; History Workshop; weekend or day schools and so on) with all the value and frustrations, serendipity and disappointments conference-going involves.

In conversation writers have conveyed a sense of informal learning, of fresh insights into for example, language issues, the total processes of book production, how publishing and opinion formation operate and how communicative power is exercised. Inevitably, problems of dislocation and cultural adjustment have also arisen from the same processes.

A collage of examples suggests something of the variety of outcomes:

"...we talked about different kinds of printing, how much they cost and what their good and bad points are "

"Some groups faced particularly difficult choices...What to choose for the booklet, what to leave out, and for what reasons - political, literary, personal?"

"I was quite surprised that you could cut the type up and move it around until the writing and pictures seemed to fit "

"'In the excitement of a conference like this I find it's a pity but I get on with the talking instead of working.'  
'But surely the talking is part of the point too, so it's not a pity, talking instead of working, because talking is a part of working '"

"'Forcing yourself to start is an effort?'

'Yes, it's like trying to wind yourself up, when it's all rusted inside of you.'

'That's all true, but I think there's something else that is often an obstacle. It's deeper than just the difficulty of starting. Some-

times people have a low image of themselves so they think, 'Well, I don't have anything to say; nothing important ever happens to me. People wouldn't really be interested in my life and what I'm saying. 'In fact that's not true - it's often quite difficult to get people to realise that in fact they do do things that are interesting'"

(Write First Time, 1978, 32;7;33;27;53-54)

Daisy Noakes:

"It's been marvellous...it merged me with the life that I had missed so many years."

(Interview, 1981)

Joyce Crump (Vassall Neighbourhood Council, SE9):

"(VNC) means a lot to me, and I want to say thank you to them for helping me to be involved in the community. They've stopped me from being a hermit. They've helped me to be in touch with other people."

(1980, facing p 1)

Dolly Davey (SE1 People's History):

"Dolly is one of many people, with a life history of their own personal struggle, taking an active part, for the first time, in public agitation (the Coin Street Inquiry)...For her, all the energy that has been contained during years at the service of rich households, and then of her own family, is at last finding an outlet. 'What I didn't have when I first wanted', she said, 'I'm getting now.'"

(1980, Introduction)

Of Dolly, fellow SE1 People's History Group member Rodney Mace has commented that before writing her autobiography she was known as Fred Davey's wife but that now, with her work well known in the Waterloo area, Fred is known as Dolly's husband. (Reported in Exploring Living Memory Conference Report, 28 Nov, 1981, 4).

Gladys McGee (at the conference mentioned here) explained how she had not thought of writing creatively until being encouraged by the Basement Writers' Project (Stepney), "a group of all ages and backgrounds". Now "she thoroughly enjoyed writing and it had helped to restore her self confidence." (Report, p 5) Ron Barnes refers both to difficulties of adjustment to unfamiliar cultural patterns among new colleagues and to major gains from association with them:

"I'm a bit afraid to get too friendly with people as well because it feels that they want to control your life, in a way. They want you to go here and go there...Also some people only kiss on special occasions - I don't understand that".

(Interview, 1980, my emphasis)

(The phrase becomes a key motif of a poem, three years on).

"I'm sorry we only kiss on special occasions'  
 'Just on special occasions'  
 Oh yes we like you  
 But please - no putting of chummy arms  
 Around shoulders  
 No, we don't go in  
 For that sort of thing  
 Too emotional.  
 But only on special occasions..."

(Where There's Smoke, 1983, 75)

"I was becoming a different person. I mean I want to be a different person. I want to be a better person, let's put it that way. But I don't want to lose the way I am as well - which is not all good! But I think if you get too much into education perhaps you become sort of a plastic type of person."

"Ken Worpole has been a great help, he really has. He really give me the idea to paint the things I've written about. Although I wanted to paint I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to paint."

(Interview, 1980)

"Centerprise brought out in me, in one year, what 9 years of schooling failed to even notice."

(Hackney Gazette, 4 February, 1975)

"I've learnt a lot...from the people at Centerprise. They've had a lot of problems with me and I've had a lot of problems... It's given me a lot of problems as well as a lot of advantages. But I'd rather be as I am through that than ever go back to what I was before."

(Interview, 1980)

Roger Mills:

"I'm sure I still wouldn't be writing without the support I got there. It was very constructive - and very critical sometimes... Even before the Hackney Writers Workshop...it was the Basement Writers (Stepney) that quite simply made me realise that there were other working-class people who were very interested in writing, and who saw it as a central part of their lives...I got to meet other writers in the group situation and socially - and also to find out that people had very different ideas about why they were doing it...So I think I've learned to communicate with people better on lots of different levels: arguing with people on certain points, having to argue the Federation case to other bodies...it gave me the chance to speak to other people who were doing the same thing: people like Ron Barnes who I could swap notes with on what we were into, how we felt about being working-class ~~people who~~ were writing."

(Interview, 1983)

Jimmy McGovern:

"...we were forced to have an improvement grant and the guy who came was a member of the workshop. I didn't know this at the time. And he found me very aggressive towards him sometimes, far more aggressive than what I saw as a slight justified. I'd be really aggressive, abusive. And I think he saw this in his own way as frustration. I think he thought I needed a channel of expression. And he was a member of the workshop and he brought me down. He was quite an observant chap, really...I believe in the whole workshop movement. It gave me a cause, really. I'd defend the workshops. And sometimes I'd turn up at the workshop even though I didn't fancy it anyway. And it got to the stage when I thought well I'm supporting the workshop rather than the workshop supporting me. But even in that very supporting of the workshop it was doing me a favour: it was giving me something to believe in...Also it it was a kind of training. I've changed in my whole style of writing. I don't think even at the time I started to write for the workshop I was writing on their terms - the terms of the bourgeois. But I've seen an awful lot of people who've come into the workshop who write on their terms, and try to express themselves in bloody iambic pentameters and things like that. And they gradually evolve and change and they start to write on their own terms in their own language. So it's a kind of stamping ground and training ground for people - and I've seen them improve in the actual telling of a story: marvellous quite rapid improvement...you get a tremendous amount of feedback in the workshop. You know, you go there and read the story and every response is pretty immediate...So that's good. I suppose that's the whole purpose of the workshop, really, to improve yourself as a writer. But there's all kinds of side issues as well. For instance I went down as a fella just going along from job to job, and I just became - I don't know, it seemed to calm me down. I talked to people who were into higher education and I went to teacher's training college...And so it's only through the workshop that I got myself involved in higher education, which changed me enormously..."

(Interview, 1980)

#### Community-publishing processes and education

There are a number of perspectives from which to consider developments in working-class writing and community-publishing in the 'third moment'. They can, for example, be explored in terms of products (in print and performance) articulating working-class experience - as formulations about and artefacts of working-class culture; or as processes - eg of community action. Some groups operate within adult education frameworks of various kinds; other projects are conceived as political, cultural, aesthetic - but not educational. What has

stood out unignorably in making the present study is that participation in community publishing projects constitutes (whether as planned or as unintended by-product) a process of collective self-education.

#### Collective self-education

"Do you not advocate self-improvement in your profession?'  
'I have never met it. People are always improved by others.'"

(Ivy Compton-Burnett, Daughters and Sons, 138)

The palpable educational success of group writing/publishing projects must be set in the context of the previous educational experiences of participants. As we have seen, many of the writers of the 'Third Moment' refer to their schooling in terms of failure and disaffection:

"I was pretty decent at writing at school but wasn't encouraged at all by teachers..."

(Evelyn Haythorne, Letter, 1981)

"I had no interest in writing at school and less interest in school itself."

(Joe Smythe, Interview, 1980)

"I don't think they really told you anything. You give them the book - all the books go in - they corrected your spelling, give you two out of ten, which I usually got for writing, put on 'Untidy work' or something like that. They never really got the child and really showed it."

(Ron Barnes, Interview, 1980)

For many working-class writers literacy was taught as a technology detached from human experience (Kenneth Goodman); disillusioned with its meagre contribution to their lives they staged a tactical withdrawal from it. On the strongest view, because of the predominance of reading over writing - or at least over writing that exploits the full range of writerly potential - in approaches to the education of the working-class (see below), that education actually tended to become the "art of teaching men to be deceived by the written word".

(Harold Laski, quoted in Innis, H, 1951).



What have been vindicated in the striking successes of recent writing/publishing projects are a cluster of educational principles: of starting from the known and familiar (actual needs, interests, experiences, subject matter - and an actual, envisioned readership); of the learning potency of participation in total processes and of shared activity and collaboration; of the importance of dismantling such barriers between 'teacher' and 'taught' as are dysfunctional, of eschewing dependence on authorities (and an associated general dependence) in favour of collective autonomy and models of partnership in which participants contribute according to ability:

"She told a story...and I said to her: 'OK, that's bloody marvellous. Why don't you write it down? Why don't you write your complete memories of that war?' She'd obviously got a real flair for language. She said that she couldn't.

So I said: 'What do you mean? Haven't you got time?'

'Yes, but I can't. I can't write.'

I said: 'What you mean is you can't bloody spell. And you probably can't punctuate'. I said: 'I'm fantastic at them. So I'll do that, you do the writing.'

A couple of weeks later, almost as a throwaway line, I said: 'Did you write anything?'

She said: 'Yes'. She gave me a plastic bag which was filled with pieces of paper. It looked as if it was any pieces she could get her hands on. What she had presented me with was 17,000 words of a manuscript.

I thought, Oh Christ. I've got this. I've really put my head into the lion's cage here. I've got to now follow through my commitment. And 17,000 words looked a hell of a lot. I read it that night and I was so thrilled by what I read I went to see her the next day and said: 'You send me as much as you can'. And what was set up then was a very good relationship, I think, between two equals who had different skills. (My emphasis) I had the skill of making the thing readable - into 'correct' English; and she had a remarkable sense of fun and was a tremendously good story-teller."

(Brian Lewis, Interview, 1982)

The writers studied have become committed to writing as a 'form of life' - and in many cases have become different kinds of readers - precisely because the tendencies inherent in their formal education have been reversed. The close relationship with the rest of their lives of what they have written and published is self-evident; the skills and 'knowledge' developed "really useful"; their 'uses of

literacy' prodigiously extended. Associated with all this is a developing and palpable sense of control and power - both personal and, more distinctively, collective - and a developing sense of community and of class.

Consideration of these two key terms - which, as we have seen, are perhaps in some tension in the label working-class writing and community publishing - affords a means of exploring just how the educational processes and outcomes under discussion may best be characterised. The same tensions identifiable in the overall project are recognisable in analysis of its educational dimension.

#### Community education

"Community art, community media, community publishing ventures provide the imaginative material created by people for their own education."

Lovett, T, et al, 1983, 39

'Community education' is among the most fertile notions on the current educational 'agenda'. Some LEAs have taken on the notion as a principle of provision; agencies (funded and voluntary) exist for its promotion; a burgeoning multiple-stranded 'literature' is in formation - eg. one strand starting from the now well-established notion of the 'community school', another focusing primarily on adult educational provision in a community context. The relationship of community education to, for example, community organisation, development and action is debated. A spectrum of meanings is emerging: from the integrated use of resources allocated to different sectors of educational and related provision and the flexible time-tabling of professionals, at one end, to a root and branch characterisation of an education 'of, by, with, about and for the community', at the other. Formidable obstacles are immediately seen in respect of any reconciliation of the latter programme with the constraints of

a state provision characterised by cultural hegemony, increasing centralism and accountability to remote agencies rather than to immediate communities. Probing the notion itself entails confronting the possibility that stress on (local) community may mean narrowness of vision, limited investigation (eg of the factors that condition learners' circumstances), 'imprisonment' in a locality and parochialism.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that alongside some exciting innovatory ventures (eg Lee Centre, S E 1 - see Something to Say, 1981) in which the 'stronger' definitions begin to be realised in curricular practice and patterns of learning and teaching, some (perhaps many) provided schools bearing the 'community' label have got little farther than making the school hall available for wedding receptions.

The writing and publishing ventures under consideration, while of course entertaining other than educational purposes, seem nevertheless prototypically 'community educational'. For example, as we have seen, the experience formulated and explored is immediate and rooted in the known community (in contrast, say, with the traditional subject-matter of 'history'. Interestingly, 'oral history' activity and 'writers' 'workshops' often crop up as examples of good, innovative community-education practice.)<sup>2</sup> The community 'educates itself': at one time Centerprise (Hackney) ran an Illich-type 'learning exchange'; writing/publishing often arise out of community action (eg Scotland Road, Liverpool, out of a rent strike/tenants' campaign) or give rise to it (East Bowling History Workshop, Bradford). 'Community' comes, in these processes, to imply "the sharing of interests as well as of geography"<sup>3</sup> - people brought into communication; such processes enact the principle of participants "alternat(ing) between the roles of student, teacher and person."<sup>4</sup> Tellingly, the identity of communication pro-

cess with community process was spelled out a quarter of a century ago by Raymond Williams:<sup>5</sup>

"Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change."

#### Working-class education

"I allow of no writing for the poor. My object is not to make them fanatics, but to train up the lower classes in habits of industry and piety". (My emphasis)

(Hannah More, in Simon 1974, 133)

"It is likewise very common, in districts where writing and arithmetic have been widely spread by benevolent individuals, to hear complaints that servants are not to be found for the lowest and most laborious offices; they have emigrated in search of better places, and, rather than return, take to dishonest courses. Of what description, in fact, are the greater part of those unfortunate beings, who are executed for forging Bank-notes, but men who have attained perfection in the arts of writing and engraving, without any demand for their honest employment, nor a sufficient moral restraint from exercising them dishonestly?"

(John Weyland, 1808)

"It is not proposed that the children of the poor be educated in an expensive manner, or even taught to write and to cypher..."

(Andrew Bell, in Simon, 1974 133)

"I got no more than a penny each week for readers and three half pence for writers..."

(David Love, collier/schoolteacher, 1823-4, in Vincent, 1974, 103)

"It is important that we do all we can to increase the audiences for today's writers, not that we increase the numbers of writers."

(Literature Director, ACGB, 1980)

"...an illiterate man is non-political"

(Lenin, in Oxenham, 1980, 12)

The educational processes of the projects under consideration are 'class-confirming' and 'class-specific'. They involve the exploring from experience of what it is to be part of a social formation which is shedding settled identities and, in response to the

undermining of employment and security, undergoing radical transformation . Viewed thus they constitute what Weber referred to as an "arousing pedagogy" and correspond to Paolo Freire's notion of exploring one's "thematic universe" as the first stage in "a critical process" (Lovett, T et al, 31). Participants, in Freire's terms, are freed to "speak their own word"; and in contrast with the tendency of formal schooling, social not personal inadequacy is taken as starting point. The 'pedagogy' (which in education is never a secondary matter; the 'how' of learning being always part of the 'what') lays stress on the informal, collaborative, democratic - a collectivity relating to the traditionally distinctive working-class characteristic of 'solidarity'. The 'skills' are practical and the 'knowledge' developed bears relation to the Chartist notion of "spearhead knowledge" (Johnson, 1979, 86; Lovett, T et al, 153). The processes under study accord with Gramsci's principle that working-class people should submit their thought to the discipline of the written word (held on the grounds that only through mastery of print might their thinking gain<sup>6</sup> the precision necessary to engage in debate with intellectuals); and in enabling to become producers of print those who have hitherto been, asymmetrically, consumers only - thus moving them towards a balanced literacy - they fit Freire's model in which literacy is seen as a basis of a 'pedagogy of the oppressed'. The products, which in their particularity signal an attack on any tendency to view working-class people as masses,<sup>7</sup> bid to enter the 'working-class curriculum' and (as has been shown to happen in the case of black reflections on<sup>8</sup> black experience) to rebuild confidence among working-class learners in what E P Thompson has called "the agency of working-class people".

In their educational aspects working-class writing and community-publishing processes are suggestive of practices that signal ways forward towards - though not, of course, as they stand a comprehensive

model of - a working-class education: ie, that starts from and builds on an understanding of the realities of working-class experience. They also direct our attention back; for viewed as collective working-class self-education the initiatives under consideration suggest strong correspondences with an early tradition of working-class self-education whose existence has begun to be uncovered and importance made clear.

As conclusion to consideration of the 'third moment' - and to herald in respect of the study as a whole a conclusion which seeks to hold all three 'moments' simultaneously in view - it is perhaps appropriate here to recall an aspect of the 'first moment' so as to bring out its relation to the educational aspects of the third.

"The pursuit of knowledge under difficulties"

"...it is only the people who conduct newspapers and similar organizations who have any idea quite how indifferent, quite how stupid, quite how uninterested in education of any kind the great bulk of the British public are."

9

Cecil King

"...there is the most unquestionable evidence that the anxiety of the poor for education continues not only unabated but daily increasing."

10

Hansard, 1st Series, XXXVIII, Col 1207

"...it can be argued that institutionalised education, more especially of the mass universal variety, has been a response to the indigenous efforts of the people to educate themselves, in their own way, according to their own objectives and aspirations, rather than a function, as it were benevolently conferred on the masses from above with purely philanthropic ends in view."

11

Brian Simon, in Hirst, 1983

"Men had better be without education than be educated by their rulers; for then education is but the mere breaking in of the steer to the yoke; the mere discipline of a hunting dog, which, by dint of severity, is made to forego the strongest impulse of his nature, and instead of devouring his prey, to hasten with it to the feet of his master." 12

There is no doubt that the dominant theme in the story of working-class education has been the struggle for an adequate provided education. A version of the story is of

"a reluctant bourgeoisie slowly yielding to socialist and working-class demands for general schooling, secondary education for all, the expansion of higher education, comprehensive schools and the raising of the school leaving age (with) the British working class... at the forefront of the struggle for state education - ever since the Knowledge Chartists argued that education could be an important counter to the raw exploitation of working-class children by an unrestrained labour market." 13

However, a small body of seminal work has begun to uncover, and celebrate, a distinct, indigenous tradition of education both of and by the working-class: of self-help initiatives of a formidably energetic, serious, committed kind - sometimes linked with political activism, sometimes not. It is within this tradition, and in relation to the contexts of its strongest manifestations, that I seek to locate the educational strand of recent initiatives in working-class writing and community publishing.

J F C Harrison has described an "indigenous minority tradition" (1961, p 44) of working-class self-education that includes the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s; the 'dame schools' ("truly indigenous institution(s) for educational self-help of the working-class");<sup>14</sup> the prodigious and often solitary activities of extraordinary individuals; remarkable hall-building initiatives; "communal reading and discussion groups (and) facilities for newspapers in pub, coffeee house and reading room"; the educational activities of friendly societies, cooperative societies and trade unions; and informal spontaneous, mutual improvement societies.

Below I refer briefly within this tradition to four such strands relating to the concerns of the present study.

#### 'Appropriation'

Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth's advocacy of the education of the working classes was full of unintended contradiction and unconscious irony:

"The radical remedy for these evils is such an education as shall

teach the people in what consists their true happiness... how their interests may be best promoted...(how they might) be made to understand their political position in society, and the duties that belong to it - 'that they are in a great measure the architects of their own fortune; that what others can do for them is trifling indeed, compared with what they can do for themselves...' <sup>15</sup>

It is unsurprising that the outcomes of early educational provision for working-class people should indicate mismatches as between the intentions of the providers and the uses made of such provision. Brian Simon has characterised the gap between aims and realisation with an example:

"...the early Sunday Schools, however they may have been intended to form the labouring poor to the virtues of obedience, conformity and Christian resignation, in fact, given the circumstances of the time, produced many working men, in the words of Samuel Bamford, 'of sufficient talent to become readers, writers and speakers in the village meetings for parliamentary reform'. So also the historian of Manchester noted in 1851 how the Sunday School teachers 'with the single undeviating purpose of promoting the eternal welfare of their pupils', were in fact 'preparing them for the fit discharge of their social and public duties. They are creating thought among the hitherto unthinking masses." <sup>16</sup>

### Individuals

Harrison (1961, II; 1984, p 293) mentions the profusion of worker naturalists and worker poets in a single district of England in the mid-nineteenth century. <sup>17</sup> Through the work of E P Thompson, Brian Simon, J F C Harrison, Richard Altick, David Vincent, John Burnett and others the awesome energy and determination of certain celebrated individuals <sup>18</sup> is now becoming widely appreciated; for example that of Leeds handloom weaver Joseph Barker, who studied English grammar and Latin from 5am to 7am before putting in 12-16 hours at his jenny gallows, his current book propped up before him the while; or Joseph Wright, a Bradford woolsorter, who taught himself to read and write with the aid of the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress, worked a 12-hour shift at the mill, slept from 2am to 5am, studied virtually the rest of the time



and eventually became Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford (a career pointing up the "dangerous ambiguity" of working-class education).

19

Working-class private venture ('dame') schools

"I hears 'em read, an say their lessons; and it's no hindrance to my trade. My works a-going on all the same. Sometimes I lays down my tools a bit; and looks over their sums, an their writing, an sets 'em fresh lessons, to be larning; an then I goes on mending my shoe again," explained John Pounds, a crippled Portsmouth cobbler, who for many years until his death in 1839 ran a school for poor children. Very few books were available, or indeed considered necessary, though sometimes a bible or testament would be used as a reader. Pounds replied to a visitor who remarked that he needed some new books:

'Why so?'

'Because those under that birdcage seem to be coming to pieces.'

'So much the better.'

'How can that be, Mr Pounds?'

'Why, ye sees, Sir, when a book's new like, an all tight together,

it serves for only one at a time; but when it comes to pieces, every

leaf sarves for one. Besides, I doesn't always larn 'em out o'books. ' 20

Of the private venture schools - one of which Robert Lowery

21

attended - there is space only to quote an admirable paragraph of

22

J F C Harrison (1984, pp 291-292):

"Why did working people cling so tenaciously to an institution for which they had to pay fees and which was in many ways inferior to the alternative state-sponsored elementary school? The answer must be that the private school offered the kind of education which many of the working class wanted, rather than the education which the middle class thought they should have. The grounds on which Her Majesty's Inspectors objected to working-class private schools were the very ones that endeared them to many of the common people. Because they paid fees to the teachers (not always punctually) the working classes controlled the schools completely. The teachers were working people like the parents, not socially superior, 'educated' persons, and they were prepared to take the children at the times and on the conditions acceptable to a working-class family. The schools were efficient in teaching basic literacy, as even the HMIs had reluctantly to admit. To many labouring people the atmosphere of a small, warm, stuffy dame's cottage may have seemed preferable to the cold, draughty and impersonal nature of large school buildings. They felt at home there, in the same way that they did when they knelt by the side of their chairs to pray at a Primitive Methodist meeting in a cottage kitchen. The working-class private school was in this sense a part of the culture of the common people, and its role raised class issues of a fundamental kind. Like the trade union, it was an agency of working-class self-

help which the middle classes did not welcome. Schools for the people were one thing: the people's own schools were quite another."

#### Mutual Improvement Societies

"Mutual shall build Jerusalem,  
Both heart in heart & hand in hand"

William Blake

"Two or three young men of the humblest rank resolved to meet in the winter evenings, for the purpose of improving themselves by exchanging knowledge each other. Their first meetings were held in the room of a cottage in which one of the members lived; and, as others shortly joined them, the place soon became inconveniently filled. When summer set in, they adjourned to the cottage garden outside; and the classes were then held in the open air, round a little boarded hut used as a garden-house, in which those who officiated as teachers set the sums, and gave forth the lessons of the evening. When the weather was fine, the youths might be seen, until a late hour, hanging round the door of the hut like a cluster of bees; but sometimes a sudden shower of rain would dash the sums from their slates, and disperse them for the evening unsatisfied.

Winter, with its cold nights, was drawing near, and what were they to do for shelter? Their numbers had by this time so increased, that no room of an ordinary cottage could accommodate them. Though they were for the most part young men earning comparatively small weekly wages, they resolved to incur the risk of hiring a room;

and on making inquiry, they found a large dingy apartment to let, which had been used as a temporary Cholera Hospital. No tenant could be found for the place, which was avoided as if the plague still clung to it. But, the mutual improvement youths, nothing daunted, hired the cholera room at so much a week, lit it up, placed a few benches and a deal table in it, and began their winter classes. The place soon presented a busy and cheerful appearance in the evenings. The teaching may have been, as no doubt it was, of a very rude and imperfect sort; but it was done with a will. Those who knew a little taught those who knew less - improving themselves while they improved the others; and, at all events, setting before them a good working example. Thus these youths - and there were also grown men amongst them - proceeded to teach themselves and each other, reading and writing, arithmetic and geography; and even mathematics, chemistry, and some of the modern languages." (my emphases) <sup>23</sup>

The pen here describing "evening classes formed...for mutual improvement" in 1844 in Leeds, is not Harrison's but that of Samuel Smiles, later thought of as the high-priest of Victorian 'bootstrap' individualism. Like the private venture schools the mutual improvement societies seemed threatening to dominant groups in mid-nineteenth century society.

However, the existence of groups of working-class people combined for mutual improvement, informally yet in regular and disciplined ways, was by no means new. Kelly (1970, 124) mentions "the mutual improvement

societies or book clubs of the eighteenth century"; referring to the 1820s Simon writes of the

"members of a small society, which 'assembled nightly at Lunn's Coffee House, Clerkenwell, devoting two evenings to reading, two for discussion, and one for music...' " 24

Twenty years on the above 'case-history' supplied by Samuel Smiles uniquely captures the essence of the mutual improvement societies - of which, Smiles claimed, there were in 1847 one or more in virtually every town and village of the West Riding of Yorkshire; of which Kelly (1970, p 123) gives examples in Glasgow, Keighley, Kendal, Birmingham, Halifax and Aberdeen; and of which (along with the Mechanics' Institutes) Dickens was an admirer:

"No central association at a distance could possibly put (working men) in that familiar and easy communication one with another, as that I, man or boy, eager for knowledge, in that valley seven miles off, should know of you, man or boy, eager for knowledge, in that valley twelve miles off, and should occasionally trudge to meet you, that you may impart your learning in one branch of acquisition to me, whilst I impart mine in another to you." 26

(An Illich-type learning exchange in 1858?) J F C Harrison comments:

"The very simplicity of these societies was their chief virtue, providing a seed which could germinate rapidly in many different kinds of soil...Such societies by their very nature tended to be ephemeral: they sprang up rapidly and died away just as quickly when they had either fulfilled their purpose or exhausted their intellectual resources. Similarly they did not belong to any specific period, but flourished throughout most of the nineteenth century; though the decade after 1844 was particularly rich in the formation of such societies...the mutual improvement society existed side by side with the mechanics' institute, the adult school, and other formally organized adult education ventures...The spontaneous formation of mutual improvement societies even in places where other means of adult education,

such as mechanics' institutes, already existed, was an indication of the dissatisfaction with the latter institutions. Sometimes this dissatisfaction was expressed as a desire to discuss political and religious subjects which were forbidden in the mechanics' institutes; but more frequently it was simply that the type of class and the method of instruction in the institutes were felt to be alien to the ordinary working man....The concentration on elementary subjects (the three Rs) in order first to acquire the tools of literacy and then to practise them, was the prime need for large numbers of working men; the emphasis on discussion classes and debates, and the determined struggle to build up a little library reflected other widely felt deficiencies; and the weekly payments of 1d or 2d (which amounted to as much as the usual subscription to a mechanics' institute) showed that working men were prepared to pay for adult education provided it was relevant to their needs and suited to their economic habits as weekly wage-earners." <sup>27</sup>

Harrison's discussion of the transformation of the self-help ideology, and the location of Samuel Smiles within the process, is of especial interest:

"...in its original expression, as a spontaneous working-class response to felt needs, self-help frequently assumed a collective form; the mutual improvement society was in essence a rudimentary organisation set up by working men to do something which they could not, as individuals, do so well alone." <sup>28</sup>

Smiles had become interested in mutual improvement societies when the Leeds group invited him to address them in 1844. At this early stage he was "sympathetic to associationist and cooperative ideas" (Harrison, 1961, 55) and had written of "the education of the working classes" that it was

"to be regarded, in its highest aspect, not as a means of raising up a few clever and talented men into a higher rank of life, but of elevating and improving the whole class - of raising the entire condition of the working man." <sup>29</sup>

However by 1859, when Self-Help was published (soon to become a massive best seller with six editions and over fifty reprintings by 1910), the dominant concept of self-help had changed utterly. Harrison's analysis is as follows: Smiles, on getting to know the Leeds group,

"was touched by their 'admirable self-shaping Spirit, and accordingly addressed them several times to the theme of men who had risen from poverty and obscurity by their own efforts...Later middle-class enthusiasm for the virtues of self-help integrated it into the dominant philosophy of individualism, exphasizing its value as a means of strengthening independent citizenship as opposed to ideas of collective or communal responsibility for social ills...What had been originally a working-class device to try to grasp some of those cultural and material benefits which were denied to them in the new industrial society, now became the middle-class reply to workers' demands for better social conditions. Once state action in social and economic affairs was ruled out as completely as in Self-Help, some alternative path to social betterment had to be offered to the working classes. This was provided - along with other remedies such as moral restraint -in the philosophy of self-help. It provided a positive side to laissez-faire, applicable in the educational, social and economic fields alike. Moreover, self-help had the advantage of being not only a practical social programme but also a moral virtue; if the working classes were poor and ignorant it was, in the ultimate analysis, because they were morally deficient. 'There is no reason', wrote Smiles in Self Help, 'why the condition of the average workman in this country should not be a useful, honourable, respectable, and happy one': self-help, which had already raised some working men, could do the same for all...The limitations of self-help as a means of raising the working classes as a whole, however, soon became as apparent in adult education as in other fields. A minority of exceptional working men could be relied upon to respond to this appeal; but for vast numbers of the working classes the suggestion of self-help was simply advice to lift themselves by their own bootstraps." 30

Of mutual, collective educational self-help Harrison comments, finally:

"The practice of mutual improvement originated long before it was popularized by Samuel Smiles, and continued to flourish until the First World War." 31

However, as G Lowndes (1969, 180) remarks:

"The years 1876-1933 saw the transformation of the inhabitants of England and Wales as a whole into a school-taught...people."

Gillian Sutherland, reflecting on early (middle-class) responses to working-class self-education initiatives, observes:

"Many...saw a two-fold need for positive action. There was a need to establish a firm control of existing sources of education in order to channel enthusiasm for knowledge in directions which were not disruptive. There was also a need to expand the provision of schools to reach the alien masses in the towns before this potentially disaffected, enthusiastic working-class minority did so. As a mid-century reformer (W B Hodgson) bitterly put it:... 'it may be questioned whether the noonday blaze of knowledge was not more dreaded by the educational patrons of the lower classes than even the midnight blackness of total ignorance'".

(1971, 9)

### 'Then' and 'now'

As between working-class self-help educational initiatives 'then' and 'now', the correspondences - in respect, eg, of students' ages, comfortable learning and control - are clear; the differences - such as, in respect of the earlier initiatives, the absence of mention of women, the apparent tendency to take, uncritically, as given a traditional 'curriculum', the preservation of financial independence - help to sharpen a sense of what is unique about recent initiatives. Nevertheless, it is telling that a characterisation by Lovett et al (1983, 7-8) -

"Educational activities eg communal readings, discussion groups... newspapers... closely related to other activities in the family, neighbourhood and work... little distinction between education and non-education. The emphasis... on really useful knowledge and collective enterprise. The strategy... one of establishing alternatives... opposed to rigid dogma..."

- fits developments then and now equally well. (In fact it is of former). There is in view of the contrast of contexts as between the initiatives here juxtaposed (including in respect of provided educational available, then and now) a danger of suggesting facile analogies. However, arguably, it does illuminate recent developments

- to conceive of them as revisiting, following the collapse of the

'Settlement' referred to above, and to some degree consciously so, <sup>32</sup> a 'crossroads' (self-education/imposed education) - just as moves

for a 'common school' may be seen as revisiting another 'cross-roads' (common school/equal opportunity to advance on merit) marked by the TUC resolution on this issue in 1897.<sup>33</sup>

Two further matters arise.

First, the mention above of certain celebrated working-class autodidacts, and of the "dangerous ambiguity" of working-class education, raises classic working-class educational problems: of individual or collective education; of "the ladder" - which Raymond Williams has called an "alternative to solidarity... a device which can only be used individually" (1958, 331-2); of educational processes as impelling working-class people 'up and out' of community and class. Such a trajectory has been far from unknown at all periods of working-class educational history; yet, as a Council of Europe study has concluded:

"without collective advancement there can be no genuine individual advancement but only uprooting."

Recent developments seem generally to be characterised by a determination to learn from the past in this respect. Lovett et al, write (15) of young working-class people returning to their communities after education and of "the vast majority who don't make the break with work or community". While Scotland Road (Liverpool) Writers' Workshop has been described ('Grapevine', ATV, 19 April, 1980) as a "powerhouse (from which) nearly everyone...goes on to do something else"; yet as a member said (FWWCP AGM and Conference, 1981):

"The up and out routine? Not at Scotland Road. Some have gone on to higher education, but they've stayed working-class."

Jimmy McGovern (Scotland Road) is a ready example of a writer whose commitment to the workshop and to FWWCP has strengthened in spite of a personal trajectory - into teaching, success as a dramatist (both main Liverpool theatres staging his plays in the same week in July, 1983), secondment from teaching to script-writing for Channel 4 TV -

that might be expected to threaten it.

Finally, self-education approaches, like all others, clearly raise difficulties. Gramsci stressed the limitations in terms of breadth and rigour of knowledge based purely on personal experience and was concerned about the need to make the transition from 'common sense' to 'good sense'. It is clear that, in the case of a group of working-class - or indeed of any other - students, collective self-direction will lead only so far; also that sustained, systematic, rigorous study eg of interpersonal communication, of personal and collective circumstances and of the forces shaping them - will be required if such initiatives are to count as a reasonably complete model of working-class education. Moves into writing/print within participation in collaborative processes constitute, as we have seen, crucial learning experiences. Viewed in the context of **education**, however, they are necessary early moves; what must not be claimed is that they are in themselves educationally sufficient. Their priorities are impressive: for example, the early attention to language issues - the speech/writing relationship, language variety and standardization, differential cultural usage, etc -

"I used to admire people who said, 'There are two points...'  
But they really meant 'on the one hand this, on the other  
**hand** that.' It's a process you have to go through. The  
respect falls away. You realise you're not inferior "; 34

the tendency in the stress on autobiographical publication to start with 'near' writing for a 'near' readership and in many instances to move from the 'dialogic' (taped interview/transcript) to the 'monologic' (solitary writing) (Moffett, 1968). Their success confirms the value - asserted by Donald Graves (1984) - of 'relevant', meaningful writing and of collaboration in the writing process.

Such a programme will, of course, take time - and it is this



Ken Worpole wants to allow for in thinking in terms of a 'long revolution' and Stephen Yeo in reminding us of the need to listen (a time consuming business) - and which some critics, impatient for the adoption of 'correct' analyses and positions, disallow.

Amid the many competing accounts of the rise/course of provided/  
35  
imposed universal schooling its role partly as response to working-class self-educational initiatives and its failure to realise working-class potential and aspirations have been generally acknowledged. The striking success as collective working-class self-education of the projects under consideration forces the latter onto the 'agenda' of any analysis and rethinking of the education of the working-class.

Eleven

CONCLUSION

"...there is underground fire in those cities now, the fire of those who have...learnt to reflect on their powerless condition."

Neal Ascherson, The Observer, 30 March, 1986

"... people cannot be developed. They can only develop themselves."

Julius Nyerere, 1973, 60

### Miners' Strike 1984-1985

"In a community under siege, there was no real choice.  
A community consciousness became a class-consciousness."

1

Striking Back, 1985, 20

"...the miners' strike serves as a reminder of the transforming effects of actual struggles on those who participate in them."

2

Francis Mulhern

Much of this study was drafted during one of the greatest national strikes of the present century. This overwhelming event, in all its similarities and contrasts with the events of 1926, constituted an uncannily appropriate context in that it touched so many of the study's central concerns: class, community and communication; 'grassroots' self-help initiatives in the face of 'tidy', centralised solutions; collective self-expression in struggle with representation and mis-representation by others; ingenious, mould-breaking publishing initiatives etc.

Participation in the activities of the strike produced immense and complex (and increasingly documented) changes in participants and communities. What is of especial significance here is that throughout the British coalfield members of mining communities, and notably women, were impelled to explore in writing their experiences and views, and to 'publish' them in both print and performance, to both 'insiders' and 'outsiders' and in a variety of contexts. Brief consideration of a sample of such 'publications' with reference to the context of their production suggests a number of confirmations, parallels and contrasts in respect of what has been discussed above and serves to draw together as conclusion many of the central themes of the study.

### Grassroots' publication

"Rarely, if ever, can a dispute have released upon the world

such a flood of talent as the miners' strike of '84."

Maurice Jones, Editor, The Miner, September, 1984

"Poet's Corner has been so overwhelmed by contributions since the strike began that we have been unable to do justice to the number or quality of poems."

'Poems from the Front Line', Yorkshire Miner,  
Strike Issue 7, December 1984, 8.

"...as we learned very early in the group's life, truthful and accurate representation in the popular press proved extremely difficult. We felt that the only way in which the history of the group would be properly written, was to write it ourselves."

Women Against Pit Closures, 1984, 43

The experiences and views of mining people have found expression/  
publication through a variety of channels and forms: established  
trade union newspapers, such as those quoted above; ad hoc news-  
papers such as The Durham Striker (produced with the energetic in-  
volvement of Huw Beynon, a veteran of the community publication field);  
an anthology published by the NUM; a joint publication by the Welsh  
Campaign for Civil and Political Liberties (WCCPL) and the NUM (South  
Wales Area) - Striking Back; such recognisably 'community publications'  
as Women Against Pit Closures, Strike 84-85; Cymbach Miners and Women  
Speak Out and Margarella, the Moles and the Money Tree, a "fairy story  
for children of all ages"; support-group newsletters; open-access  
video projects around the country; performances such as the Miner  
Poets 'poetry event' at the Purcell Room (London, S E 1) in August,  
1984, and the National Women's Rally at Barnsley in May, 1984; stage-  
plays - some composed entirely of the experiences and views of parti-  
cipants - and retrospective collections such as The Heart and Soul  
of It, More Valuable than Gold and Here We Go: Women's Memories  
of the Miners' Strike. There is in addition evidence that what has  
found outlet in such 'publications' is but a fragment of what was  
produced: that the impulse thus to formulate on paper/in writing/in  
performance experience and views was powerful and widespread.

Such 'publication' typically served the double function of communication and of 'going on record' in "print and history",<sup>16</sup> on the ~~one~~ hand, and fund-raising on the other. The potential of writing/publication as fund-raising was realised early and, in some cases, plans were made to retain some receipts as 'seed corn' for further fund-raising editions.<sup>17</sup> Writing/performance as fund-raising is not, of course, a novel feature of recent working-class publication: for example, Fife miner Joe Corrie wrote, and assembled a group of miner-players to perform plays to raise funds during the General Strike and miners' lockout of 1926.<sup>18</sup> Nor are union-based strike publications novel -

"With the absence of newspapers during the General Strike, many local strike committees issued their own duplicated bulletins. Often these contained notes or verses on the strike written by strikers, and popular features were copied by other bulletins"<sup>19</sup>

- nor, as we have repeatedly seen, is publication in union journals a new development; nor yet is spontaneous publication by working-class people in apparently temporary association: the many publications by servicemen in World War II,<sup>20</sup> and The Orbit, "The Official Magazine of the South Lambeth Road Stretchers Party Depot" - in which, Stan Rothwell writes, he "first began to pen (his) thoughts about war"<sup>21</sup> - are examples. What are apparently novel are, on the one hand, the unambiguously 'insider' role of writers and the more broadly-based democracy-of-publication illustrated within the '84-85 Miners' Strike - in contrast, perhaps, with both dominance of 'specialist' 'pitmen poets' in the First Moment and with the union-based publication and patterns of articulation and celebration by 'outsiders' (like Montagu Slater, discussed above) in the Second Moment; and, on the other, the novel and much-discussed involvement (in a context of struggle of a traditionally male-dominated industry) of women.

## Women

"In the coalfields there is a new breed of women who are only as old as the strike..."

Strike 84-85, North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the impressive publications by women, women contributors have featured prominently in all bar one of the publications mentioned. For example, of the contributors to the NUM's Against All the Odds whose attributions allow identification by gender, over a third are by women. In Striking Back Carole Harwood shows that "women on picket lines, women defying authority...is not a new phenomenon"<sup>23</sup> and Angela John has valuably brought back<sup>24</sup> into focus the experience of the 'pit brow lassies'. However, the latter tended to be the objects of much debate rather than self-representing subjects:

"...the women themselves were hardly given a chance to express their views."<sup>25</sup>

Suggesting a contrast with these forerunners, as well as with other active women more recently, Anne Hunter (Barnsley Women Against Pit Closures) makes a point about the women who began to speak and write in 1984-1985 which relates to what emerges in respect of the female protagonists of community publishing as a whole since 1971:

"There are, of course, comparisons that can be made between the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and the women's support groups (in pit areas, 1984-1985). The one ingredient in these groups that differs from the 60s movement is that these are WORKING CLASS WOMEN".<sup>26</sup>

## Publications: Form and Content

Referring to Against All the Odds Jaci Stephen reminds us,<sup>27</sup> superfluously, not to expect "great works of art!" What we do find, in about equal proportions, are prose formulations of experience and views, and poetry, in all displaying many of the features discussed above of community publications in general. The writings, unsurprisingly, tend to be uneven in their effectiveness: often fleetingly

powerful, invariably the stronger as the more particular -

"We'd play out on t'street, my sister and me,  
And we'd wait for our coal covered Dad.  
I'd carry his duddly, she'd carry his snap tin,  
Then we'd share the jam butties he had..."<sup>28</sup>

Gill Foers

"Miners have always known the price of coal -  
Paid most often underground;  
But this time they poured out their blood  
Among the elderflowers and wild roses 29  
On a dusty road outside the cckeworks"

Barbara Brookes

- or when economical:

"The landlord stands in an empty pub, wiping a twice-  
cleaned glass..."<sup>30</sup>

Michael Sanders

- or when offering insights unavailable to 'outsiders':

"Our families are being pretty good. I have lost my independence  
during this strike. I never had to borrow money off my mother  
until now " <sup>31</sup>

Ferndale, S Wales

"Peter:... It's the easiest thing in the world to make a pit  
uneconomic...Take Deep Duffryn for example: the money  
they were earning a year before that strike down there,  
they were earning fantastic money, they couldn't believe  
it. They put all this money on the wage bill, and the  
balance sheet showed a loss.

Trish: Or they buy new pit props and leave them on the surface.<sup>32</sup>  
It shows up in the books then that the pit is losing."

They tend to be the stronger the closer they stay to idiomatic speech -

"I'm blacklisted now until I've paid up. I'll never get HP  
tidy again now. Once your name's down you can't get it taken  
off. I've always paid regular before."

<sup>33</sup>  
Treherbert

"Aye lad - a thowt a knew yer - an a nivver thowt a'd see  
The day when tha'd go thro' them gates - and turn thi back on me.

The lines an' lines of bobbies - tried ter keep us all i' place  
But as the bus rushed by us all - a recognised yer face.

Ave worked wi' you for all these years - a thowt you were mi mate  
Ave watched yer back while workin' - now a watch it thro' the gate.

Wi've shared us jobs, wi've shared us snap, wi've shared us soap  
in t'bath <sup>34</sup>  
But there'll be no more sharin - in the bitter aftermath..."

Jean, Kippax, Yorkshire

- and where they exploit the comical and humorous:

"We were told by some local coppers that their nickname for the Mets was 'Bananas' 'cause they were slightly bent, yellow and hung round in bunches" 35

"At Daw Mill we were not allowed to shout 'scab' or 'blackleg'. We had to call them 'bounders'"

Abertillery

"The cops said we could say 'bounder' or 'cad'"

Aberpergym

"We were told not to shout scab. We could say 'bounder' or 'jelly baby' at Ollerton "

36

Nantgarw

"'Hello. Is that the listening bank?'

'Yes.'

'Well listen to this. As you know we're having a rough time, what with the strike and all that. But I want to be fair with everyone so each Friday night our lass and me sit down in the kitchen and write the name of everyone to whom we owe money on bits of paper. There'll be about forty.

That done, our Linda folds them neatly and puts them in father's hat. The baby is encouraged to pick one.

I'm phoning to say that if I get any more letters like the one that I got this morning, your name's not going in the hat." 37

Often successful is a reaching-back to the traditional forms of miner-poets, such as the ballads that bubble up everywhere -

"Four miners' wives were arrested that morning,  
From the pickets at Silverhill pit "

38

Anne - Worsborough, Yorkshire

"Ah reckon we could've just waited -  
To 'ave Christenin' first's no disgrace -  
But ah'd set me 'eart on being married in white  
An it wor gerrin' tight at the waist.

So we went to the Registry Office  
With only us dads and us mams  
But it does tek the shine off a weddin when t'talk  
's about price of second-hand prams."

39

Jean-Kippax, Yorkshire

(and note the use of graffito and the balladist's device of 'incremental repetition' in Stan Royston's 'MacGregor Was Here' - "MacGregor  
was there" (the steel industry) "MacGregor was here" (the coal industry) 40  
- and the ubiquitous parodies -



"She maketh me to lie down on park benches  
 She layeth me down beside still factories...  
 She prepareth a reduction in my wages...  
 Surely unemployment and poverty shall follow  
 All the days of my life..." 41

- of which perhaps the most remarkable was the chilling version of  
 'The Laughing Policeman' included in Ken Loach's film 'Which Side  
 Are You On?' (Channel 4, January 1985).

"Things will never be the same again"

These words, and variations on them, referring to the personal and  
 collective lives of participants occur constantly throughout the work  
 under discussion. Whether uttered by young miners collecting cash on  
 the London streets or by a married miner discovering for the first time  
 the switch on the vacuum cleaner, 42 or implied in the reporting of  
 such new experiences as are caught by Raymond Williams in his novel  
Loyalties, which includes scenes of the strike -

"I never thought in my life I'd order a hundred tons of  
 potatoes and a thousand dozen eggs" 43

- they signal potentially profound changes. Amid the testimonies of  
 realisation, and division, of communities, and of transformation of  
 relationships, the pattern of benign and malign effects is complex:

"...since the strike's been on, it's all different. He cleans  
 up now, washes up, I can go out, and when I come in he'll make  
 a cup of tea for me. I can go and lie down for an hour...I shall 44  
 be sorry when the strike's over, if it's only for us own marriage "

"...marriage guidance counsellors...in Barnsley and Doncaster  
 report that there were increased numbers of miners and their  
 wives visiting counselling sessions either as couples or as  
 individuals" 45

"When many of the women speak about this strike they may be  
 treading a tightrope between their solidarity with and their  
 grievances against the men in their communities." 46

On all sides is testimony to personal and collective transformation:

"Police treating people rough: coming in at six in the morning  
 and frightening the children. Suddenly I said: 'My God, that's  
 been happening to the blacks for years'." 47

Kate Whiteside

"It's made us so aware ... We're just different girls, aren't we?  
We're just all different girls." 48  
Eirlys Furlong

"My attitudes have changed through the strike. I thought I was a socialist before. Now I know what socialism is - it's a whole way of life, and we're living it in our valley right now."

49

Neath and Dulais Valley

"Not merely in collectivising traditional household chores in strike kitchens and other arenas of relief work...a novel awareness that through collective activism women could influence the circumstances of their social existence...a positive and evolving trust in conviviality, grass-roots initiative, the collective creativity of those with no significant individual influence or resources..." 50

Specifically writing and publishing activity has merged with other strike experiences and cannot easily be isolated in terms of its effect. Both Women Against Pit Closures and Strike 84-85 represent first attempts at book production by the key participants. Both were prepared at high speed - one to appear before a predicted end to the strike in August 1984, the other to be ready before a predicted anniversary in March 1985.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the most striking aspect of the first is the account of conceiving, organising and above all addressing a rally of 15,000 women on the part of women to whom this would have been unimaginable before the strike. Like many other community publications, that is, it charts and embodies the discovery of talents of which their possessors were previously unaware.

This study has undertaken, fundamentally, two tasks: to characterise three identified 'moments' of working-class writing so as to understand better the developments of the present and the recent past; and to explore the experiences of working-class writers in their moves into writing, print and various modes of publication. This concluding section attempts briefly to suggest points of contact as between recent and earlier developments and experiences and to suggest what appears to be novel and distinctive about - and point the importance of - the 'Third

Moment'. The foregoing section on the Miners' Strike serves as a starting-point.

### Three 'Moments' of working-class writing: parallels

The sheer amount of writing and publishing within mining communities in 1984-1985 represents a pattern within which writing by pit people has always been salient and which is now becoming visible to the student of all three 'moments'. However, this tradition has been until recently submerged and largely 'invisible' (as with that of a whole range of the endeavours of women before the determined and imaginative work of feminist writers and publishers from the 1960s). The work of such as John Burnett and David Vincent (on working-class autobiographies), and of Andy Croft, Jerry Dawson and others in promoting the republication of the work of Walter Brierley, George Garrett, Idris Davies, Lewis Jones and so on, and of such scholars as Martha Vicinus, has done much to bring this tradition back into view - just as the distribution of Miners' Strike publications may have helped to bring some contemporary community publications to a wider readership. In addition, Strike publications illustrate the variety of 'channels' of publication that working-class writers have always developed, as well as a characteristic and notable ingenuity of distribution.<sup>52</sup> Formally, the dominance of reminiscence and reflection and of certain kinds of poetry, and the use of parody, place the publications of the Strike firmly within the context of recent initiatives and establish links, especially, with the work of the early nineteenth century.<sup>53</sup> As for content, typicality/representativeness of experience has been an important dimension of what is published - recently as in the past<sup>54</sup> - and putting things 'on the record' - before memories fade or the bulldozer's work is complete, and especially for children/grandchildren - has been a continuing motive for writing.

There has been some clear continuity of subject-matter and themes as between the three 'moments' - for example, exploration of tramping

and 'low life'. While the three 'moments' afford parallels in being times of convulsive change (eg in technology and work practices, urban environment and unequally distributed social misery) and of widespread 'outsider' interest in working-class (especially now 'inner-city') life (note the 'authentic documentarism' striven for by such 1930s investigators as George Orwell, and Jack London and H Marshall -

"Here I feel strangely detached: my ordinary comfortable life is part of another and entirely separate existence: the drab walls of this little room in Poplar shut out completely my family, my friends, my usual interests, all the pleasant distractions of the easy-going world.

Not wholly detached, though: it is impossible to shake off the oppressive weight of human misery which surrounds me. A midsummer night; half-past one by my somewhat erratic watch: in three hours' time I shall hear my landlord shuffling along the passage on his way to call those of his neighbours who are working the early shifts...He may see a chink of light under my door, and wonder why his lodger is not asleep. If I were to tell him that I am trying to write a book about the slums, he would be bewildered.

'A book?' he would say. 'A book? What's the bloody use of that...'"  
(Slum, 1933, 1-2)

- men who moved in, sometimes in disguise, to report from the 'front line'), recent work proclaims a new confidence that individual, 'insider' working-class experience and its reflection, partly in response to these transformations, may well command attention. General to all 'moments' has been the reported experience that appearing in print has meant really  
56  
being listened to for the first time.

The local, community basis of origin of most of the Strike and other recent publications suggests identity with the first 'moment' but is in sharp contrast with the centralised, London-based pattern of publication of the 1930s.  
57

Decentralisation of the means of publication is broadly common as between the first and third 'moments'. In respect of the third 'moment' the decentralised pattern is of a piece with political trends (discussed above) such as the growth of "small d democracy,"  
58

of the influence of local, community initiatives, constituency political parties, etc. However, whereas private middle- and/or upper-class patronage was a condition of book publication in the earlier periods considered,

more democratic backing for recent publications has come from public funds and (bearing perhaps some relation to some forms of subscription publication) the contributions of participants and sympathisers. Sometimes the providers of (eg adult) educational funding have had to be educated to the value of writers' workshops (as opposed to formal literature or writing classes) and wooed into backing publications. Groups have often pursued their work, as it were, in the interstices of formal and public provision. There is, in addition, some suggestion that recession or other forms of 'enforced idleness' (eg the Strike) has sometimes provided contexts for writing. There are well-known examples in the 1930s; and in respect of the 'first moment'

"Many of the industrial workers' songs stem from two of the worst of... wholesale recessions - 1800 to 1815 and 1830 to 1840." 59

A further parallel perhaps worth noting is a tendency to contempt on the part of establishment metropolitan critics. Tirades have been quoted above in respect of the first ("England expects every driveller to do his Memorabilia...") and second ("This book is called the autobiography of a London taxi-driver. It might just as well be the autobiography of any one of the so-called 'ordinary people' who have realised the commercial possibilities of cashing in on their experiences in life by writing a book. It is written in the accepted style, variously called by reviewers 'startlingly frank', 'ingenuous', or just 'crude'...") 60 'moments'. Of the flourishing of this tradition in the 'third moment' the following is an example:

"These alternative typers have something interesting to say. They are wildly romantic in supposing that everyone can write, while ignoring such concomitant diseases of scribbler's itch as writer's cramp, swelled head, exhibitionism, introspection, paranoia, anorexia nervosa of the intro, delusions of grandeur, self importance, and cruelty to the reader." 61

## Contrasts

Earlier working-class writers emerge as individuals, and, in some prominent examples, as upwardly-mobile autodidacts. Their participation in publication tended to end with the writing (or, in Clare's case, the re-writing). The publications of the Miners' Strike, like those generally (although not invariably) of the third 'moment', involve<sup>62</sup> crucially both collaborativeness and participation in the whole process of publication. Although to some degree enabled by technological development, these distinctive features owe most to major shifts in purpose and attitude to process and, as we have seen, account for the collective self-educational dimension of recent experiences, thus re-making links with a nineteenth century educational (though not specifically writing/publishing) tradition of high importance.

Again, whereas many perhaps most of the prodigious autodidacts and prominent individual working-class writers of the earlier 'moments' tended to accept a pre-written 'agenda' and to acknowledge and defer to 'authorities' in the matter of writing (eg John Jones; B L Coombes in 'Below the Tower' - Hodge is a blend of deference and independence in these respects), much, perhaps most, 'third moment' work is conceived as oppositional and in defiance of literary authority and tends in both process and product more towards a radicalising than a gentling effect.

Of a piece with this has been a further distinctive feature of recent developments: an entirely new confidence in that 'unbuttoned', vernacular, non-standard language which in the context of writers' social experience, comes 'naturally'. Use of the tape-recorder has clearly played a part in this - as it has in bringing 'unlikely' people (unlikely perhaps most of all to themselves) into print. We have seen nonstandard dialect used 'dramatically' (for speakers other than the author) in both earlier 'moments', and with 'a certain sort of (often contemptuous - eg Dataller, Coombes) 'placing', and in recent Strike poetry; we now see it, in addition, used without such framing. There is a new (though not uniform) confidence in the

'demotic' that reflects a considerable (though far from complete) transformation in attitudes to language (consider, for example, how strange pre-World War II radio announcers now sound). There are, again, traces of a new pride in 'working-class culture' (just when, ironically, that phenomenon is undergoing profound transformation). The contrast between views of the St Leger meeting at Doncaster as between Roger Dattall half a century ago and Evelyn Haythorne recently (see Appendix Seven) gives a flavour of this.

Another confidence indicator is the virtual disappearance of the pseudonyms and concealment that were especially common in the second 'moment' (eg Hodge, Brierley, Heslop), if less so in the first (eg Burn, Manby Smith), and never altogether absent (eg, Buckmaster, <sup>63</sup>Noonan/Tressell). <sup>64</sup>The particular context of the Miners' Strike (e g fear of victimisation and less predictable consequences of 'speaking out') has produced an extensive use of first names only.

The language democracy noted above is then as we have seen matched by a marked democracy of participation, explained partly by the absence of conventional literary and profit criteria of selection in play and editors deploying them. Working-class writers of the earlier periods were predominantly exceptional figures. Whereas John Burnett found among nineteenth century working-class autobiographers a preponderance of those

"who did unusual, exciting or dangerous things...miners, sailors, soldiers and steel workers"

in recent developments the 'ordinary' have very much predominated.

Again, if we recall remarks made about Robert Lowery's autobiography (1856-1857) in particular, and generally about those of Victorian artisans -

"His autobiography was...intended to advertise the cultivation a self-educated working man could acquire...Lowery never sees a distinct popular culture as central to working class dignity or working-class identity...Victorian artisans were of course exceptional men, and their autobiographies...'are the last place in which to look for references for anything but the most accept-

able forms of behaviour' ..."<sup>65</sup>

- the extent of the contrast with recent developments is brought into focus. While typicality/representativeness remains elusive, recent attitudes and approaches (exploiting technological change) have gone far to removing the 'aura' from writing/publishing and some way to constituting every man a potentially publishable writer.

And every woman. The prominence of women writers in developments since 1971 (and noted above especially in the Miners' Strike publications) is a point of striking contrast with the earlier periods, notwithstanding the marked correspondence noted earlier between Mary Collier's graphic eighteenth century portrayal of working women's 'second shift' and, say, those of the 'third moment' contributors to As Things Are.<sup>66</sup> Explanations offered for this (eg differential distribution of opportunities for literacy in the first 'moment', and pre-1960s suppressions and submersions)<sup>67</sup> are as yet difficult to evaluate. The participation of women (alongside a generally freer attitude to explicitness about such matters) explains an attention to home life and relationships (including the physical aspects) which, although still comparatively rare (especially in the work of men), represents a marked contrast with earlier 'silences'. As Alex McLeod has observed, the burgeoning in the mid 1980s of community-published writing by women bids to constitute virtually a distinct 'fourth moment'.

#### 'Third moment' publishing and collective-self education

Finally, a question arises from considering the educational success (for participants) of 'third moment' processes: as to how it is that many working-class people who left school as reluctant or failed writers, specifically, and generally disenchanted with and alienated from the idea of education - how such people have become habitual, committed writers, -and often different kinds of readers with a transformed understanding of



themselves, their situation, the politics of communication, etc.

Answers emerge from contrasting not so much teachers as schooling, on the one hand, with working-class writing and community-publishing processes, on the other.

68

School writing is long on quantity (outstripping by far the other language modalities) but short on quality. It is predominantly 'transactional'; it rarely arises from the actual needs and purposes of writers: tasks are typically imposed and products addressed (published) to a pseudo-reader - the 'teacher as examiner'; limited contexts of writing (eg examinations and protracted rehearsals for them) tend to entail the growth of assumptions such as that writing is a 'sudden death', single-draft, individual, isolated activity - consider the implications here of a reported idea of Essex L E A, to save money on paper by reverting to slates - and that technical shortcomings damn product and producer alike.

69

The contrast is immediately obvious. It is furthermore figured in a contrast between the approaches of two men working within comparable (though importantly different) enterprises in the same mining district of South Yorkshire - separated by some fifty years.

Roger Dataller, Yorkshire miner, fresh from an utterly seductive scholarship sojourn at Oxford University, now 'adult education organiser' back in his home coalfield, breezes into a pit village club and announces himself to two men playing snooker:

"I should like to see someone in authority...I'm interested in lectures."

They pass him to a third man, disturbing a card school in the process:

"Do you think your people would be interested in lectures?"  
'Lectures about what?'  
'Industrial History - Literature.'

He is passed on again: to a third man, at another club up the road where a "vaudeville act" is in progress:

"We might get some of the younger men, he thought, if we started with lantern lectures..."

But the conversation breaks off as the membership calls for and gets an encore.

The tone of Dataller's account (given in full in Appendix Six) assumes a readership in cahoots - ie sharing his contempt for those before whom he casts his pearls in vain - a stance which, in view of what appears now as a crassly tactless approach, it is impossible for us to adopt.

Brian Lewis (Interview 1982) evokes an entirely different strategy:

"I went into a small community called Mexborough and went into its Citizens' Advice Bureau...I persuaded them to see if they could recruit to the class for me. On the first night of the class I'd got about ten. The class was called 'Call that a play? I could do better myself'. I think it expressed my optimism in the belief that anybody who'd sat in front of a television for twenty years...could write a television play. All they had to do was have a bit of confidence and a bit of nous about how to start. Because there were ten I decided that we had to have a common theme and picked...the 1939-1945 War. And I said to the people, tell a story..."

(That night was the start of the Evelyn Haythorne project, described above).

"The same week I went into a community called Rossington and there found a very old man, and the class this time was called 'The 1940s and afterwards' - it was a history class. (I was doing the economic history bit: you have to have these classes sounding a bit high flown because it was university funding. What I was going to do when I got there was totally different from what the university thought I was going to do.) But there were only three people there and I'd travelled twenty-five miles to get to the bloody place. I decided it was just not on to keep the class going. I said, I'm going to finish the class next week - thanks for coming: I can't come back next week; I can't get the money for the petrol. I said to this old guy: tell me what happened to you. He started telling me and twenty minutes later I said, Look mate, your stories are clearly a lot more interesting than what I was going to talk about. I'm prepared to come back and write it down until you finish telling it. And I invited the two women to come with me and write down the old guy's story. Eventually we took to meeting for about two hours every Wednesday for about fourteen weeks and we took down the story."

What are contrasted here are attitudes to adult education, though the second (as we have seen) embraces an openness to the possibility of

community publishing (our central concern here). Self-evidently, the two approaches belong within entirely different 'frames of reference'; furthermore, it would be inappropriate and simply 'unhistorical' to condemn the former for its evident failure to imagine the perspectives and interests of potential 'students', innocence of what have become basic educational principles etc - or to imply that newer necessarily means better (note such educational achievements as those of the Clydeside and South Wales Miners' Federations). However, while examples of sensitive, imaginative practice which assumes that students have much to bring to their own education - to say the least - are not now difficult to find,<sup>70</sup> it would be fanciful to imagine that such shifts of approach have been universal. The processes of community-publishing groups, viewed here in their self-educational aspects (and with no implication that this represents their most important dimension) model a promising development of adult educational practice and stand in sharp contrast to the dominant practices of the second moment.

The 'third moment' groups studied above, mostly passing in their formative years through the era of 'free-schooling' and 'de-schooling', practise the fundamental precept of starting from where people are; writers explore what interests them for their purposes and for genuine publication. Collectivity and collaboration are fundamental (together, often, with a partly-known readership, tending to reduce the loneliness of the 'longdistance' working-class writer); successive drafting, revision, editing are standard practice in contexts of production, participation in which illuminates the actual nature of all published texts; the technical dimensions of writing and print communication are restored to an appropriate perspective so that both their importance to helping readers take intended meaning becomes clear, and also that their mastery is not a precondition of having something to write that is worth reading. In short, the excitement of writing (which invites - as speech rarely can - approximation through re-drafting towards the discovery

and formulation of meaning, permanency of record amid the flux of experience and represents another mode of thinking about experience) and of publication (with 'distance no object' and the possibility of an unnumbered and unknown 'audience') are recovered for many whose previous experience of the one has often been of a hated chore (even, in schooling, a calculated punishment)<sup>71</sup> and of the other non-existent.

The products of community-publishing - while involving more 'producers', shorter, more immediate books, more provisional writing and often, as we have seen, the mingling of the autobiographical and the fictive, and while also nailing the lie that working-class 'ability' has long since been 'creamed off' by the arrangements of a 'meritocratic' education system - contribute towards redressing a class asymmetry in respect of whose experience and views come to be explored in print. Thus encountering 'ordinary' lives is potentially confirmatory, confidence-building and inspirational of further writing and publishing. (Elsewhere (Gregory, 1984a) I have argued a place for the use of community-publications within formal educational provision).

Negative working-class attitudes to writing as activity, especially its characterisation as a fly-by-night alternative to real work - and on the part of men rather than women - have cropped up throughout the study affecting writers from John Clare to Ron Barnes, and are often expressed in language coloured by a strong feeling.<sup>72</sup> A new familiarity on the part of the many 'ordinary' working-class writers referred to above seems, in the 'third moment', to have begun the long process of undermining a class suspicion of and alienation from writing whose historical/linguistic roots are at last coming into focus. This shift, allied to more democratic patterns of publishing, bid to make less likely such sad 'trajectories' as those of such as Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley, Robert Bloomfield and John Clare. Just as more and more

non-working class groups have come to appropriate the creative in-  
stitutional achievements of working-class people in their associations<sup>73</sup>  
so educators have much to learn from the creative processes of working-  
class writing and community-publishing groups.<sup>74</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

Notes to pages 8 to 28One: Introduction

- 1 David Vincent, 1981, 201.
- 2 There has been an understandable tendency for writers within and commentators upon the obscured and quantitatively minor tradition of working-class writing to claim 'firsts'. Michel Ragon (1974, 82) shows that this tendency has not been confined to this country: e g Magu (1788-1860) a weaver-writer of Lizy-sur-Ourcq (Seine-et-Marne asserts: "Je suis le premier tisserand, Je pense, qui soit fait lithographier..." (I believe I am the first weaver to have his lithograph made...).
- 3 'Conversation', BBC Radio 4, 16 December, 1985, 7.20 pm.
- 4 The Guardian, 6 June, 1985, 20.
- 5 New Statesman, 5 July, 1985, 26.
- 6 Open University, BBC 2, 29 November, 1982.
- 7 The Guardian, 16 February, 1984, 12.
- 8 Martha Vicinus (1974, 4) writes: "I am concerned with working-class writers who began their adult lives as working men." Michel Ragon (1974, Introduction) has an interesting and useful exploration of these issues.
- 9 See, for example, David Vincent, 1981, 149-152.
- 10 Jones is included in Gustav Klaus's (1985) The Literature of Labour: 200 Years of Working Class Writing (e g 53-59). In The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British Working-Class Literature Martha Vicinus specifically points out Jones's non-working-class origins (4, 100) yet includes him with three other Chartist poets whose "poetry and writing mirror many of the strengths and difficulties of pioneering a written working-class literature." (98)
- 11 e g David Vincent, 1981 (criteria made explicit, 2-3); Burnett, J., Vincent, D. & Mayall, D., 1984.
- 12 Compare Mark Benney's "Wide" and "Mugs" dichotomy (1936, eg 25).
- 13 Compare Mikhail Bakhtin's insistence (against Formalism) that to regard literature as "linguistically a practice apart" is undemocratic. See John Sturrock, 'Jamboree', London Review of Books, 20 February, 1986, 13.
- 14 Note Gareth Stedman-Jones (1983, 188): "How then did these new aspirants to gentility regard the 'unwashed' proletarians crammed together in the smoky regions which they had left behind? In times of prosperity and stability, they probably thought little about them at all, since their major concern was to create a life style removed from them... But in times of political disturbance and economic depression, this complacent self-absorption gave way to fear and anxiety. As the physical distance between rich and poor areas increased, personal acquaintance diminished. Knowledge or rumours about the conditions and attitudes of the working-class came not from personal experience, but from Parliamentary enquiries,

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from the pamphlets of clergymen and philanthropists and the sensational reports to be found in the press." We shall need to add - in print form from working-class 'witnesses' themselves.

- 15 For example, Margaret Powell.
- 16 Reflecting on his novel-in-progress one of my interviewees, Roger Mills, has said: "I think the problem with it really is that it's a bit of an awkward thing because it is trying to remain very much a Federation-type book, in that people speak realistic dialogue and nothing too exciting happens, but also because I was trying to work in the novel form...I think that's the difficulty for a lot of Federation writers: once they've written their own story, an autobiography or a story that is vaguely about themselves, what happens then? With poetry the problem's not the same, though obviously people have problems. With prose you just document things that happen to you or you write fiction. There have been lots of fictional short stories in the Federation but usually based very much on a real incident that people have embroidered. But once you start moving into fiction, it's all a bit worrying. You almost feel a bit guilty. Like. 'Here I am using everything I've learnt in the Federation, and all these little incidents, and here I am making it into a story, a fictional story'... I think novels are a difficult thing for the Federation to handle, really. I don't mean in terms of printing or anything; I mean in terms of concept: they're not that comfortable in the Federation - I feel. Maybe it's just me." Interview, July 1983.
- 17 First catch your text! Because they often fall outside the scope of mainstream print referencing arrangements community publications are easy to miss altogether and, once identified, often difficult to obtain. For example, discovery of the existence of Miner's Strike publications involving visiting likely bookshops; contacting groups and individuals (some with prior interest in community publishing, some within ad hoc support groups); and monitoring NUM and related publications. A fair measure of serendipity is involved.



Two: A First 'Moment' of Working-Class Writing

- 1 Quarterly Review Vol XXXV, 28 December, 1826, 149-165.

I am indebted for reference to this and much material besides to Dr David Vincent's important and scholarly Bread, Knowledge and Freedom: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working-Class Autobiography Europa 1981.

- 2 See below. Sir John Betjeman made it clear that dealing with such material constituted a major, and in his case welcome, part of his Laureate duties.
- 3 Attempts in Verse by John Jones - An old servant: with some account of the writer, written by himself, and an introductory essay on the lives and works of our uneducated poets by Robert Southey, Poet Laureate, 1831.
- 4 Ibidem, 167-168.
- 5 Kenneth Clark, 1962 The Gothic Revival Murray 3rd ed ch 1.
- 6 Sir Paul Harvey, 1967 The Oxford Companion to English Literature Oxford (Fourth edition), 132.  
Robinson (1983, xi) writes of William Langland (1330?-1400?) as "an authoritative voice...speak(ing) for the ploughmen, the threshers, the hedgers, shepherds, woodmen and horse keepers..."
- 7 London to Edinburgh on foot; "a very merry wherry-ferry voyage from London to York" (by sea to Boston via Cromer and the Wash, thence by "inland navigation"); "London to Queenborough in a brown-paper boat" - each journey "resulting in a booklet with an odd title". See Oxford Companion, 805 and Jones/Southey, op cit 15-87.
- 8 See Jones/Southey, 88-113; Oxford Companion, 252; Rayner Unwin, 1954 The Rural Muse 47-67; Raymond Williams 1973 The Country and the City 87-90. The present section of this study is indebted, especially, to Unwin's study.
- 9 The English version given is the Loeb translation by H R Fairclough. The final ten words translate the final phrase of the original sentence - 'Laudet diversa sequentes' - which were omitted in the Grub Street Journal quotation. I am grateful to Charles Rudd of Brunel University Library for his elucidation of these lines.
- 10 Unwin, 1954, 11, 70.
- 11 Ibidem, 72.
- 12 Richard Altick, 1957 The English Common Reader, 241
- 13 February, 61.
- 14 Unwin, 88.cp Charles Manby Smith reading to his workmates (C M Smith, 188) and Alexander Somerville paraphrasing to his (Somerville, 46-7).
- 15 Op cit, 90
- 16 See Unwin, 118-120; Oxford Companion, 883
- 17 Unwin, 91.
- 18 Ibidem, 91.

Notes to pages 45 to 53

- 19 Oxford Companion, 97
- 20 William Hazlitt, 1819 Lectures on the English Poets (2nd edition)  
(Delivered at the Surrey Institution) 187-190.
- 21 Hazlitt, 187-188.
- 22 Unwin, 105.
- 23 Ibidem, 108. Bloomfield inevitably invites comparison with Duck.  
Like the latter Bloomfield inspired imitation (an uneducated  
Croydon farmer attempted to remedy what he saw as insufficient  
attention to hay-making in The Farmer's Boy, - Unwin, 100);  
also both were, in Unwin's phrase, 'one poem men', 106). See  
Roger Sales (1983, 18ff)., for an interesting discussion of Bloomfield.
- 24 J M S Tompkins, 1938 The Polite Marriage
- 25 Unwin, 78 -79.
- 26 Unwin, 33
- 27 Owen Watkins, 1972 The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual  
Autobiography. I am grateful to Owen Watkins for first suggesting  
to me the links and correspondences between the traditions we were  
studying.
- 28 Owen Watkins, 226.
- 29 Watkins, 2.
- 30 Thomas Goodwin, Works, 1704 Vol V, p xii, quoted in Watkins, 2.
- 31 Watkins, Ch 5.
- 32 Watkins, Ch 7.
- 33 Watkins, 63.
- 34 Watkins, 30.
- 35 Henri Talon, 1951 John Bunyan, 132, in Watkins, 119.
- 36 G.A Starr, 1965 Defoe and Spiritual Autobiographies Princeton  
U P, in Watkins 236.
- 37 Watkins, 226.
- 38 In Watkins, 226.
- 39 Paul Delaney, 1969 British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century  
in Watkins, 227.
- 40 Watkins, 227.
- 41 David Vincent, 1981, 15-19. See also Nye, 1981, and note 87 below.
- 42 E Robinson, (ed) 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings xii.

- 43 Hansard's Parliamentary Debates 3rd series Vol 63 May, June 1842, 1355 7 June 1842 'Employment of Women and Children in Mines and Collieries'; The Guardian, 1 March, 1984, 12.
- 44 Brian Simon, 1974 The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780-1870, 163.
- 45 See Richard Altick, 1957 The English Common Reader Ch 12. See also Alexander Somerville, 1848/1951 The Autobiography of a Working Man, 42: "When I was a boy (b 1811), the periodicals which are now so common, cheap, and useful in supplying young minds with information, did not exist."
- 46 Richard Altick, op cit, 1.
- 47 See Richard Johnson's important essay "'Really useful knowledge': radical education and working-class culture, 1790-1848" in Clarke, J et al (eds) 1979 Working Class Culture: Studies in history and theory, 75-102.
- 48 Simon, op cit, 198-199.
- 49 J F C Harrison, 1984 The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present, 276ff.
- 50 See Raymond Williams, Guardian, 5 April, 1984.
- 51 J F C Harrison, op cit, 241. As W H Hudson makes clear, the effects were severe and by no means confined to the industrial cities. Examples of the victims include a farm worker who, "maddened by want" took a sheep ("...when he was hanged his poor young wife travelled to the place of slaughter to beg for his body..."); and a youth of 18 who was transported for life for stealing a pocket handkerchief. (1910, 1981) A Shepherd's Life MacDonald, 153, 156.
- 52 Eric Hobsbawm, New Statesman, 29 November, 1963, 787.
- 53 J F C Harrison, op cit, 243.
- 54 K Worpole, 1983 Dockers and Detectives, 77.
- 55 See A Briggs, 1960 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth Century England' in Briggs, A & Saville, J eds. Essays in Labour History, 43-73.
- 56 J F C Harrison, 1984 The Common People: A History from the Norman Conquest to the Present, 230.
- 57 R Williams, 1973 The Country and the City, 134.
- 58 Jones/Southey 1831 op cit, 1. Compare contemporary worker writer Frederick Williams's poem 'Liberty Pen': announced by the poet (at a miners benefit event, July, 1984, Purcell Room) as about the release writing affords.
- 59 Jones/Southey op cit, 179.
- 60 Jones/Southey op cit, 9, 10. Compare B L Coombes, below.
- 61 David Vincent, op cit, 34; Muckle, W 1981 No Regrets, 27

- 62 "But when we are told that the thresher, the milkwoman, and the tobacco-pipe-maker did not deserve the patronage they found. - when it is laid down as a maxim of philosophical criticism that poetry ought never to be encouraged unless it is excellent in its kind, - that it is an art in which inferior execution is not to be tolerated, - a luxury, and must therefore be rejected unless it is of the very best, - such reasoning may be addressed with success to cockered and sickly intellects, but it will never impose upon a healthy understanding, a generous spirit, or a good heart." (Jones/Southey, 164).
- A passage from Southey's Life of Wesley and the Rise of Methodism (1890 edition), quoted by Edward Thompson (1963, 46) helps keep Southey's sympathies in perspective: "Perhaps the manner in which Methodism has familiarized the lower classes to the work of combining in associations, making rules for their own governance, raising funds, and communicating from one part of the kingdom to another, may be reckoned among the incidental evils which have resulted from it..." See also Richard Johnson (1976, 48).
- 63 Jones/Southey, 165
- 64 Jones/Southey, 10
- 65 R Altick op cit, 241.
- 66 'Making allowances' for working-class writing is an issue to which we shall need to return. For the moment it suffices to quote a remark of Edward Burne-Jones about miner poet Joseph Skipsey, for whom he obtained funds (from the Royal Bounty) and an annuity:
- "He ...must carry about with him the pain of knowing that all he did could only be judged after allowance made..."
- Quoted in Martha Vicinus 1974 The Industrial Muse, 140.
- 67 In John Clare (1827/1964) The Shepherd's Calendar eds E Robinson & G Summerfield, xi.
- 68 Idem, viii.
- 69 Quoted in Brian Alderson's review of John Clare's Autobiographical Writings (ed Eric Robinson) in the Times Educational Supplement 6 January, 1984.
- 70 London, 1931, 9. The sheer scale of Clare's output (poetry and prose), and of his achievement, is only now beginning to be apparent. He wrote over 3000 poems, many published recently for the first time. In addition, 1983 saw the first publication of a collection of folk songs and of a body of prose observations of the flora and fauna of the Helpstone district, including only what he had personally seen. (This document contains a large number of 'first recordings'; its general impressiveness is enhanced by consideration of Clare's lack of such equipment as field glasses, magnifying glasses, barometer, microscope etc). The quality of this newly-published work alone makes reappraisal of Clare's achievement an urgent literary task. (I am greatly indebted to Antony Price for the stimulating W E A course 'John Clare: Man and Poet' held at Salisbury on 13 October, 1984, for my awareness of some --of the above issues).

- 71 ed. E Robinson 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, 12
- 72 Letter to John Taylor, 8 February, 1822. In (eds) J W Tibble & A Tibble The Letters of John Clare, 1951, 132
- 73 E Robinson, ed (1983) op cit, 17.
- 74 Introduction to The Shepherd's Calendar Op cit, ix.
- 75 Idem, p xi. The butchery of The Shepherd's Calendar is perhaps the most spectacular case.
- 76 Letters, 49.
- 77 'November' in John Clare The Oxford Authors eds. E Robinson & D Powell, 1984, 140.
- 78 'Remembrances' in op. cit., 260.
- 79 'Helpstone' in op cit, 4.
- 80 ed E Robinson, 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, 21
- 81 Ibidem 10.
- 82 Ibidem 10.
- 83 Ibidem 15.
- 84 ed A Tibble, 1980 The Journal, Essays, The Journey from Essex , 13 (Introduction).
- 85 See (eds) E Robinson, & D Powell 1984 John Clare, Introduction, xx.
- 86 ed E Robinson, 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, 2
- 87 B Hollingworth, 1977 Songs of the People, 11.  
Compare the following from Sussex farm worker James Nye: "...the church parson was always telling me that I must work out my own salvation by fear and trembling, but I believe he told me to do what he never did his self, for I believe his heart remains unchanged unto this day, so I think there's not much fear and trembling there." (Written between 1860-1888; published 1981).
- 88 From The Pitman's Pay and Other Songs; in M Vicinus, 1974 The Industrial Muse, 215.
- 89 Hollingworth, 3.
- 90 First draft and revision(separated by four months) both undertaken during pit strike (March, 1984 - March, 1985).
- 91 M Vicinus, 1974, 60.

- 92 Idem, 34.
- 93 Jon Raven (ed) 1978 Victoria's Inferno: Songs of the Old Mills, Mines, Manufactories, Canals and Railways, 13.
- 94 Ibidem, 14.
- 95 Ibidem, 9.
- 96 Y V Kovalev, 'The Literature of Chartism' (translated by J C Dombreck, & M Beresford) in Victorian Studies, Vol II, 1958, 117-138, p 119.
- 97 J D Vincent 1981, Bread, Knowledge and Freedom, 152
- 98 Kovalev 122.
- 99 M Vicinus, 1974, 94.
- 100 T Cooper, 'To the Young Men of the Working Classes' in M Vicinus 1974, 1.
- 101 Kovalev, 118.
- 102 D Vincent, 1981, 115.
- 103 M Vicinus, 1974, 98.
- 104 M Vicinus, 1974 Ch 3. Ernest Jones, barrister and aristocrat, was perhaps the most famous Chartist poet - though obviously not of the working-class.
- 105 Kovalev, 121.
- 106 In M Vicinus, 1974, 97.
- 107 Loc cit
- 108 Op cit , 98
- 109 Kovalev, 125.
- 110 Vicinus, 1974, 140.
- 111 Charles Manby Smith, 1967 The Working Man's Way in the World, v .
- 112 D Vincent, 1981, 35.
- 113 W Dodd, 1841 A Narrative of the Experiences and Sufferings, William Dodd A Factory Cripple, Written by Himself Reprinted in The Factory System Illustrated Frank Cass, 1968.
- 114 Ibidem 276-277
- 115 Ibidem, 276
- 116 Ibidem, 278
- 117 Smith, 1967, 4.

- 118 Smith, 1967, Preface, v .
- 119 D Vincent, 1981, 24n.
- 120 Part of his subtitle.
- 121 Dodd, 1968, 271-272.
- 122 Ibidem, 319.
- 123 Smith, 1967, 321. Compare the appeal to typicality/representativeness of experience as criteria of working-class publication in K Worpole, 1977 Local Publishing and Local Culture.
- 124 Smith, 1967, vi.
- 125 D Vincent, 1981, 23.
- 126 Dodd, 1968, 292.
- 127 Ibidem, 318-319.
- 128 Length, elaboration, antitheses, ellipsis; such features sometimes suggest imitation Samuel Johnson.
- 129 eg a local preacher (147); another "half-choked with the Northumbrian burr" ( 317).
- 130 336
- 131 David Vincent, Introduction p 25 to J D Burn, The Autobiography of a Beggar Boy 1978, 25.
- 132 Ibidem, 29.
- 133 Contemplation of such a tendency affords one route into a comparison of working-class autobiography publishing patterns, then and now.
- 134 Watkins, 1972, 64.
- 135 (eds) J W Tibble & A Tibble, 1951 The Prose of John Clare, 11.
- 136 D Vincent, 1981, 21. "making permanent a set of memories increasingly threatened with dispersal..." is an important aim of many autobiographers of the 'third moment'. See for example, F W W C P 1978 Writing, 136.
- 137 Somerville, (1848-1951), xxiii, xxiv.
- 138 Burn, 1978, 39.
- 139 In Burn, 1978, 3.
- 140 Burn, 1978, 37.
- 141 Somerville, 1951, xxiii.
- 142 D Vincent, 1977 Testaments of Radicalism ,3.
- 143 S Bamford, (1884; 1984) Passages in the Life of a Radical, 12.
- 144 Ibidem, 11.

- 145 Ibidem, 11.
- 146 (ed) D Vincent, 1977 Testaments of Radicalism, 37
- 147 D Vincent, 1981, 26.
- 148 R Lowery (1856-1857; 1979) Robert Lowery: Radical and Chartist (eds) B Harrison, and P Hollis, 39.
- 149 Loc cit.
- 150 Loc cit.
- 151 Vincent, 1981.
- 152 D C Anderson, American Historical Review Part 87, 1982, 452.
- 153 B Sharratt, 1973; B Sharratt, 1982, 241-264. See below.
- 154 ed E Robinson 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, 5
- 155 A McLaren 1978 Birth Control in Nineteenth Century England, 216-7, Quoted in Lowery, 1977, 11.
- 156 John Bezer (1851, 1977) Autobiography of one of the Chartist Rebels of 1848 in ed D Vincent, 1977 Testaments of Radicalism.
- 157 Vincent, 1981, 15-17.
- 158 Burn, 202.
- 159 Vincent (ed) 1978, 18.
- 160 In Lowery, 1979, Introduction, 20.
- 161 Bezer, 153.
- 162 Vincent, 1981, 19.
- 163 My translation, as in all passages quoted below.
- 164 Vincent, 1981, 157 ff.
- 165 M Vicinus, 1974, 140.
- 166 ed E Robinson, 1983 John Clare's Autobiographical Writings, 4, 9-10, 11. Compare the loving description of a similarly multi-purpose kitchen table by James Fulljames (born 1910) in The Times of Our Lives (1983) Peckham Publishing Project, 32-33.
- 167 A S Collins, 1928, The Profession of Letters...1780-1832, 42-43 Quoted in R Altick (1957, 1963), 97.
- 168 M Vicinus, 1974, 28.
- 169 See, eg, Jones/Southey, 1831, op cit, 167. 'The March of Intellect in the Butchering Line', in M Vicinus, 1974, 28.



- 170 This is especially telling when considered alongside the remarkable achievements of contemporary middle-class female novelists.
- 171 See J F C Harrison 1984 The Common People 286-7; 163-6; "Literacy rates correspond roughly to opportunities for schooling" (165).
- 172 eg Clare (passages quoted above); Somerville, 12 (fellow quarry-worker. Robert Wallace, who would walk a 40 mile round trip on his Sunday off to borrow a book), 44 (his father sent "half a week's wages" to Edinburgh for The Gospel Sonnets for Somerville, 48. Somerville paid struggling local publisher, George Miller of Dunbar, 10s 6d for The Book of Nature Laid Open. See also Altick, 1957/63 Ch 11; Vincent, 1981, Ch 6.
- 173 eg Somerville, 47, Bamford, S, 1849, Early Days, 280 quoted in Vincent, 1981, 123; J A Leatherland, William Heaton, reported in Vincent, 1981, 124-125; Charles Manby Smith, 1967, 10. See also the experience in this regard of Swindon 'Hammerman' Alfred Williams (in eg, Clark, L 1969 Alfred Williams - his life and work); and below of Herbert Hodge, B L Coombes, Roger Dataller, Joe Smythe, Ron Barnes and others.
- 174 Vincent, 1981, 120 ff.
- 175 Vincent, 1981, 20.
- 176 Vicinus, 1974, 49.
- 177 See J F C Harrison, 1984, 166 ff for a useful brief discussion on the relationship of oral and written in the culture of "the common people."

Three: Herbert Hodge: Taxi Driver (1901-1962)

- 1 It's Draughty in Front, Michael Joseph, 1938, 7
- 2 Op cit, 12
- 3 Op cit, 14
- 4 Op cit, 38.
- 5 Op cit, 40.
- 6 Op cit, 62-63.
- 7 Op cit, 63.
- 8 Op cit, 156.
- 9 Op cit, 157
- 10 Op cit, 159-160.
- 11 In a stimulating talk at Centerprise, Hackney, January 1982, Raymond Williams explored these questions. Tracing the origins of the notions of 'one correct English', 'real English' as opposed to the subordinate, 'eccentric' varieties of English, Williams remarked: "We have to recognise that there's an inbuilt bias within writing against what we broadly mean by popular expression" and "The advantages of the workers being able to read were soon realised; but the idea of their writing was always a puzzle:... what could such people have to write?"
- 12 Op cit, 160
- 13 Op cit 161-163
- 14 Op cit, 164
- 15 William Cobbett, 1937 Advice to a Lover, 18-22. Stationed in New Brunswick, Canada, Cobbett (then aged 20) saw the 13 year old daughter of a sergeant of artillery and was struck by her beauty and 'sobriety of conduct'. "It was now dead of winter, and, of course, the snow several feet deep on the ground, and the weather piercing cold. It was my habit, when I had done my morning's writing, to go out at break of day to take a walk on a hill at the foot of which our barracks lay...It was hardly light, but she was out on the snow, scrubbing out a washing-tub. 'That's the girl for me,' I said..."
- 16 This flexibility has allowed many cab-drivers to try other 'careers' without 'burning their boats'. Fred Housego - a 'Mastermind' winner now working for BBC (Radio Times, 9-15 January, 1982, 43) - is a contemporary example. Note the following item from the Daily Herald of 25 May, 1950, reprinted in Cab Trade News, June, 1950:  
 "When Barbara Wootton, A BBC Governor and London University professor, wants a taxi, the driver may be her husband. In private life she is the wife of George Wright, who sits on the LCC for South-West Lewisham. He was a Fulham taxi-driver when they married 15 years ago, but an unusual one - he held a diploma at the London School of Economics. He gave up cab-driving and worked for the WEA but now

he has gone back to his taxi. He likes the life, though he has been heard to grumble that the extra threepence on the clock tends to come off the driver's tip. Wright does not use his taxi when he goes to LCC meetings. He usually pedals there on his pale blue sports model bicycle."

17 It's Draughty in Front, 220

18 Op cit, 221

19 Op cit, 221

20 Op cit, 221

21 Op cit, 221

22 Op cit, 222

23 F L Carston, 1967 The Rise of Fascism p 219. Reviews of It's Draughty in Front tended to seize on Hodge's description of and brief association with Mosley, a figure who had, of course, taken on a quite different significance by 1938. Cavalcade's anonymous review (20 August, 1938), headed "Mosley no Fuhrer", observes: "He paints an interesting character-sketch of England's would-be Fuhrer as he was in those days, while still wavering between militant Socialism and black-shirted Fascism" and devotes half its length to Hodge-on-Mosley. Stanley Owens, for Cab Trade News (September, 1938), understandably feels the need to reassure Hodge's colleagues of his socialist credentials: "Herbert says his interpretation of the slogan ('Britain First') - 'it seemed to mean something different to every member' - was 'Socialise Britain First'. Be that as it may, this interlude gives a splendid personal insight into the original Mosley organisation, and should convince all readers that Herbert never was, by thought, word, or deed, a Fascist." Mary Kay Wilmers ('Atilla the Hus', London Review of Books, 4,4-17 November, 1982, 4) wrote of Mosley: "He joined the Labour Party, and later left it, because he wanted a platform from which to say that one way or another everything ought to be different and be applauded for saying so".

24 It's Draughty in Front, 239.

25 Op cit, 240.

26 Op cit, 240.

David Selvin (1963) elaborates this point: "Typography, illustration, design, and colour are not merely the elements of an exercise in aesthetics, but a substantial aid to the attractiveness and readability of the printed piece. Their function is to attract attention, encourage readership, sustain interest, provide a broad gamut of emphasis. They do for the printed word what the skill of a public speaker does for the spoken word: they help to organize the presentation, to underline and emphasize the principal points of interest, to provide moments of relief between stretches of tension, to avoid monotony and dullness. The speaker accomplishes these results with changes of pace, with gestures, with rising and falling inflection; the editor with the skilful use of type faces and headlines, illustration and colour. And they are increasingly necessary to the union journal which daily and inevitably, if often unconsciously, is compared with the lively examples that abound on every newsstand. These have raised the level of the readers' expectations; the journal suffers if it fails to meet them."

- 27 Chris Searle: "I'm never satisfied with just duplicated sheets. Whenever I see a decent bit of work I want to see it properly published and properly presented..." G T Gregory, 1979, 221.
- 28 It's Draughty in Front, 240-241
- 29 Op cit, 245.
- 30 Op cit, 245.
- 31 George Eliot, 1872, Middlemarch.
- 32 It's Draughty in Front, 246
- 33 "I've had a number of jobs in my life, but have never found any body of men so varied in thought or disposition as taxi-drivers... Drivers are never shy of airing their views on ranks or elsewhere, but it's the devil's own job to get them to put anything on paper."
- 34 See also the poetry, some of it published elsewhere, by Bro. Bert Neville (C T N August, 1950, Dec 1951), who had earlier, at the age of 53, gone to fight in Spain. Note the following report by Dave Morley and Ken Worpole (New Statesman, 30 April, 1982, 19): "When the T & G W U's monthly newspaper The Record reported last year on the subject which had elicited more correspondence from union members 'than ever before' on any issue, that issue was - not unemployment, not the state of the Labour Party, not complaints about the food on shop stewards' courses - but poetry."
- 35 This crops up again and again (e g July, 1935; June, 1950). Note the house depicted on the magazine cover (Appendix One).
- 36 Limitation of the number of cabs allowed on the streets of London - a crucially important issue to drivers.
- 37 It's Draughty in Front, 258.
- 38 How far he 'travelled' in this respect is indicated in his perceptive discussions of the radio audience ( eg It's Draughty in Front, 275) discussed below.
- 39 'Useful' is a key word ('really useful knowledge 'etc.) in any discussion of working-class education. Just how useful C T N set out to be is underlined by a feature of its cover (see Appendix One): the journal could even find use as a measure/ruler!
- 40 CTN, May, 1937.
- 41 CTN, Oct, 1938.
- 42 Bro, L G Head, CTN, June 1938: "It is, however, impossible for me to meet you all individually and talk books, and so we must resort to writing." Toby Interview, 1981: "To think that...people would, through the book, get to know me - though, probably many of them would like to meet me personally and talk some of these things out - perhaps they'd be too far away."
- 43 Dave Ritman, C T N editor in the 1950s has told me that during his 'reign' publishers would send lists for him to tick off books CTN was prepared to review.
- 44 It's Draughty in Front, 260

- 45 It is clear from Bro. L G Head's opening piece in this role - like Hodge's a sort of manifesto - that the change of personnel was not to entail a change from Hodge's 'open-door' policy:  
 "...my aim is to let you know about the books which are likely to interest you personally. It is, however, impossible for me to meet you all individually and talk books, and so we must resort to writing... I have had handed to me a list of less than a dozen names of people willing to review books. Now surely London cabmen (10,000 of you) can produce more than that number who are interested in books. Let's hear from you!" (CTN, June, 1938).

Head goes on to mention the problem of the price of books and recommends cheap Everyman and Penguin editions:

"For the 'Red' there is Marx's 'Capital'... for the lovers of fiction... Charles Dickens... Maugham and J B Priestley."

The features of Hodge's approach, noticed above, are still there - including the informal educational role, a part of course requiring the nicest judgement of tone.

- 46 James Moffett, 1968.

- 47 The broader tendency of people in associations to generate magazines (eg troops' magazines in the Imperial War Museum; The Orbit - The official Magazine of the South Lambeth Road Stretcher Party Depot - mentioned in Lambeth at War by Stanley Rothwell, S E 1 People's History Group, 1981, 11) would clearly repay some investigation.

- 48 Mention of three other drivers helps convey it.  
 The first and long-serving editor, Stanley Owens, in reviewing Hodge's autobiography (September, 1938) makes a revealing aside:

"...the same post which brought Herbert's book...brought also the "returned-with-thanks" manuscript of a play I had helped to write".

Stanley Owens seems to have been the single most significant figure in CTN. He founded it, took a day off work "to sell and ensure the paper a good send-off" (from a tribute to him, CTN, Feb 1950) and his name was given as the publisher until March, 1937. After his move to Cornwall he continued to correspond with CTN and insert the following advertisement:

**MR. & MRS. STANLEY H. OWENS**

will be very pleased to meet any of their old friends from the London Cab Trade at

**SUNNYSIDE PRIVATE HOTEL**

Camelford. North Cornwall

which is a comfortable and convenient centre from which to tour, hike or coach around King Arthur's Country. Terms on application.

Robert Buckland, whose brief but important writing association with Hodge is discussed below, contributes prolifically and variously to CTN over a long period (including a spell as editor, 1939-1940); is later reported (October, 1947) to be writing scripts and lyrics for - and performing in - "The Carroll Levis Show", producing material for Clapham and Dwyer and "In Town Tonight" and "additional material" for the film "The Brass Monkey"; and still later (as reported to me in a personal letter from an ex-cab-driver colleague - a report I have been unable to confirm) to have become a barrister.

Dave Ritman (editor, 1950-1952) wrote a formidable amount of CTN during his time in office including a lengthy editorial in every issue, pieces which, he has told me, while they took about ten minutes to read took literally 12 hours of drafting and redrafting until they were fit for publication.

49 At times CTN was in a position to give grants "to the tune of £300" to the 'Benevolent Fund & Coop'; in times of difficulty football competitions were staged to raise funds. (CTN, Feb 1950).

50 It's Draughty in Front, 247

51 Op cit, 248.

52 For example, Van Gyseghem, Andre, 'British Theatre in the Thirties: Autobiographical Record' in Jon Clark, et al (eds) 1979 Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties; 'The Workers' Theatre Movement' - 'A Propertyless Theatre for the Propertyless Class' (interview with Philip Poole) in Red Letters, No 10; 'Agitprop and Unity Theatre: Socialist Theatre in the Thirties' in Jon Clark et al (eds) 1979 (above). Andrew Davies is currently preparing a book for MacMillan Press on alternative theatres since 1800. See also New Statesman, 12 July, 1985, 29. See also Left Theatre 1985 Merseyside Writers.

53 John Lehmann, 1940 New Writing in Europe, 136.

54 Clark, 1979, 232.

55 John Allen Interview, 1982. John Allen has been actor, director, writer; H M Schools Inspector of Drama; Principal of Central School of Speech and Drama; Visiting Professor of Drama, Westfield College, University of London. His Theatre in Europe City Arts was published in 1981.

56 John Allen Interview, 1982. See also 'Eisenstein and Others' by Herbert Marshall in The Listener, 22 March, 1973, 364-367.

57 'Theatre' in Writing in Revolt, Fact, No 4, July 1937, 33-34.

58 John Allen Interview, 1982.

59 John Allen Interview, 1982.

60 John Allen Interview, 1982.

61 The story of Pins and Needles - its staging at the New York Labor Theatre and on Broadway, its country-wide tour and performance for President Roosevelt in The White House - was told by Harry Goldman at the Conference of the Oral History Society at Hull University, March 1982. The paper is published in Oral History, Vol 10 No 1, Spring 1982, 56-66.

- 62 John Lehmann, 1940, 136.
- 63 'Some Notes on the Formation of Left-Wing Amateur Theatre Groups', Left Book Club Theatre Guild, 18, cited in Clark, 1979.
- 64 Lehmann, 1940, 136-137.
- 65 Fact, July 1937, 32-33.
- 66 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 67 It's Draughty in Front, 252.
- 68 Op cit, 253.
- 69 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 70 It's Draughty in Front, 255-256.
- 71 John Lehmann, 1940, 137.
- 72 Quoted in R Gullan & Buckley Roberts 1937 Where's that Bomb?
- 73 It's Draughty in Front, 256-257.
- 74 The skirmish with the Lord Chamberlain was explained to me by John Allen as follows:

"(Hodge's) story is that here you get this working-class writer who's out of work until he finds the brainwave of writing patriotic rhymes on toilet paper... a sort of heavy-handed symbol of the gutter press. The Lord Chamberlain would not have toilet paper... We said, 'The whole basis of the play rests on this'. And he said, 'Can't you have shaving paper?' We said, 'My dear sir, the working classes don't know what shaving paper is'. I don't. I said, 'Surely a reference to toilet paper is nothing like as socially upsetting as the smutty sex that goes on in a large number of West End plays?' And he made the most marvellous answer to that. He said, 'Ah yes, you're absolutely right. But, you see, there are occasions when we talk about sex in the drawing room, but we never mention lavatories.'"

(John Allen, Interview, 1982)

Compare Graham Greene: "The theatre censor was a nice old colonel in the Guards, very nice to chat to, but who didn't help very much. I had trouble with him with my play, *The Living Room*, because of the sounds of the lavatory flushing." 'Trials and Errors of film-ing in Greenland', Dennis Barker, The Guardian, 4 September, 1984, 3.

- 75 John Allen Interview.
- 76 It's Draughty in Front, 261.
- 77 Op cit, 263-264.
- 78 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 79 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 80 Fact, July 1937, 37-38.

- 81 Clark, 1979, 232-233.
- 82 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 83 Clark, 1979, 107.
- 84 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 85 It's Draughty in Front, 256.
- 86 John Allen Interview, 1982.
- 87 The major discussion at the Annual Conference of the F W W C P, April, 1980, was on precisely this theme.
- 88 A major theme at the F W W C P Annual Conference, April, 1981. See Ch 7.
- 89 It's Draughty in Front, 255.
- 90 Op cit, 262.
- 91 John Lehmann, 1940, 137.
- 92 When I mentioned Hodge to a driver at the T & G W U Cab Section he misrecalled - significantly, I think - "Ah yes, 'It's Lonely in Front'."
- 93 "Mr Herbert Hodge is one of those rare, remarkable, and, to professional writers, irritating people who become extremely good writers when there is no reason, according to all the set rules why they should be... he touches ordinary life at so many points from first-hand experience, and he always has something fresh to say." (A G MacDonell - The Observer)  
  
"Candour is so rare in writing that one comes even to dissociate it from talent. Mr Hodge is a really candid writer; that, one might say, is his talent. His unpretentious pages give the clear picture of a sensitive, practical, thrusting, timid, stupid and intelligent man. Yes, Mr Hodge contradicts himself - and convinces us."  
(G W Stonier - New Statesman).
- 94 A parallel case arises with contemporary railway guard-poet Joe Smythe (discussed below). From the press conference (July, 1980) held at N U R H.Q. to launch The People's Road, press photographers took him across Euston Station, borrowed a guard's cap and got him to pose leaning from a train window.
- 95 One of the many determinations on this readership was, of course, financial. Stanley Owens (C T N, September 1938) reviewing It's Draughty in Front ends: "The only likely misfortune is that most of us will have to wait for a cheaper edition (it's published at 8s 6d) or take our turn at the libraries. It's well worth waiting for." This was at a time when the highest wages for skilled manual workers was around £4. 10s. per week.
- 96 It's Draughty in Front, 159
- 97 Op cit, 216.



- 98 Cp. discussion below of the essay 'Difficulties of the Educated Writer', Note 177.
- 99 It's Draughty in Front, 5
- 100 Op cit, 244.
- 101 Op cit, 40.
- 102 Cp Morley, D & Worpole, K 'Writers at Work' New Statesman 30 April, 1982: "Local newspapers often maintain the mystification surrounding the practice of writing by their 'Is this Grimethorpe's answer to Shakespeare?' kind of reporting...When...Joe Smythe published his collection...The Guardian ran its account of the book-launching under the headline 'I Wandered Lonely as a Guard.'" See also the same writers' discussion of this in The Republic of Letters (1982, Ch.4) and Marion Glastonbury's review of it (T E S, 13 August, 1982): "It is easy to understand the anger which such sneers provoke...". Cp also Philip Howard's shrill outburst, The Times, 30 May, 1978, 14: "These alternative typers have something interesting to say. They are wildly romantic in supposing that everyone can write, while ignoring such concomitant diseases of scribbler's itch, as writer's cramp, swelled head, exhibitionism, introspection, paranoia, anorexia nervosa of the intro, delusions of grandeur, self importance, and cruelty to the reader..."
- 103 Leonard Barnes, Margaret Cole, Lancelot Hogben, Storm Jameson, George Lansbury, Arther Calder-Marshall, Rudolph Messell, Francis Meynell, Stephen Spender.
- 104 Cp 1981 'People's History of Yorkshire' exhibition entitled 'Designs for Prince Charles' Wedding Cake' and subsequent series of 'counter-cards'.
- 105 Fact No 4, July, 1937, 5.
- 106 Op cit, 5-7
- 107 Op cit, 10.
- 108 Op cit, 10-11.
- 109 Fact No 2, 87.
- 110 Fact No 4, 11.
- 111 Op cit, 12-13.
- 112 Op cit, 13-17.
- 113 Cp the impact of less mediated 'documents' such as the testimonies in Life as We Have Known It (1931, 1977) ed Margaret Llewelyn Davies and Maternity: Letters from Working Women (1915, 1978), same editor.
- 114 Fact, No 2, May, 1937, 88.
- 115 It needs to be borne in mind however, that (as Betty Reid has put it in 'The Left Book Club in the 1930s' - in Clark, 1979, 205): "there is ample evidence that (LBC) claimed a substantial membership of manual workers, as well as those in minor clerical, distributive and similar 'white collar' occupations. These sections were often composed of men and women already staffing the labour,

co-operative and trade union movement who had previously engaged in W E A and other workers' educational organisations. They found in the Club a rich new source of books and ideas...". Shortly after reading this I visited the N London home of an old colleague of Herbert Hodge: active union man and for years Islington Labour councillor. His collection of books and pamphlets (1920s onwards) represented a sort of documentary history of the Left in his time. Prominent was a long run of L B C titles.

- 116 Fact, No 22, January, 1939, 15.
- 117 Cab, Sir?, 1939, 43, Cp the passage in Amis, Martin (1973) The Rachel Papers Cape: London, 68-9 in which the protagonist, parting from a girl he wishes to impress, hails a taxi, mentions a leading London hotel, swishes off leaving her on the pavement - and pays the driver off as soon as the taxi is out of sight round the corner.
- 118 Cab, Sir?, 130
- 119 Op cit, 138. Cp, Alan Pryce-Jones's reminiscence of Evelyn Waugh "toiling up the hill to Hampstead so that his letters might bear a more distinguished postmark than Golders Green", in David Pryce Jones (ed) Evelyn Waugh and his World 1973, 8.
- 120 Op cit, 219.
- 121 Working Lives II, 1977 Centerprise
- 122 Op cit, 26: "On occasions (the barber) would become the confidant, Father Confessor, mentor and advisor of his customers, especially in sexual matters...I remember being asked for and giving advice to four or five young men about to get married - advice on the functions and duties of a bridegroom."
- 123 Cab, Sir, 286
- 124 cp Ron Barnes A Licence to Live 1974 Centerprise.
- 125 Fact, No 22, 10.
- 126 Op cit, 10-11.
- 127 Op cit, 18.
- 128 Op cit, 39.
- 129 Op cit, 25-30.
- 130 Op cit, 40-41.
- 131 Op cit, 48.
- 132 Op cit, 70.
- 133 A Cockney on Main Street, 29-30.
- 134 Op cit, 32.
- 135 Op cit, 37.
- 136 Op cit, 21.

- 137 Op cit, 89.
- 138 Dylan Thomas is perhaps the best-known example: T S Eliot lecturing to a packed stadium among the most bizarre.
- 139 See also above Hodge's review of Gide's book on his experience in the U S S R. H G Wells made an early pilgrimage; Bertrand Russell went with a Labour delegation in 1920 (Russell, 1964 332ff.); the Webbs wrote a "panegyric" following their visit (G Stedman Jones, New Statesman, 21-28 December, 1984, 32); J M Keynes, went in September, 1925 and reported in measured terms tinged with optimism. (A Short View of Russia, 1925, Hogarth). Of the fashion an Adelphi contributor in March, 1933 was to write: "To Moscow, to Moscow, to have a quick look, Home again, home again, write a fat book."
- 140 A Cockney on Main Street, 23.
- 141 Op cit, 65-66.
- 142 Op cit, 95.
- 143 Op cit, 63.
- 144 Op cit, 80.
- 145 Op cit, 84, 88.
- 146 Op cit, 95.
- 147 Op cit, 95-97.
- 148 It's Draughty in Front, 265.
- 149 Paddy Scannell, 1980, 'Broadcasting and the Politics of Unemployment 1930-1935' in Media, Culture and Society, 1980, 2, 15-28.
- 150 Scannell, 1980, 21.
- 151 Scannell, 1980, 23. A further illustration of the brief radical flowering within the B B C around 1933-1934 was "a series of articles (not broadcast)...commissioned and published (by) The Listener...in which representative types of unemployed were asked to describe the psychological effects of unemployment - what it did to their social life, their intellectual faculties, their interest in public affairs, and their expectations for the future. It was then published as a book (Beales and Lambert, 1934), and was subsequently used as documentary evidence by Beveridge of the human consequences of unemployment (Beveridge, 1944, 244-245)" (Scannell, 1980, 20). Beales and Lambert explain in their introduction (9-13) the origins of their study in reading investigations into the psychological effects of unemployment then recently published in Poland and Austria, as well as their methodology; and, in a phrase with a strikingly modern ring, seek to allocate their work to the category 'qualitative studies of unemployment.'
- 152 Scannell, 1980, 24. It is salutary to note that a contemporary Radio Four series (August/September, 1982) 'Poor Britain' could well excite the same sort of incredulous reaction.
- 153 Scannell, 1980, 26, 27.

- 154 R S Lambert, 1940, Ariel and all his Quality Gollancz.
- 155 Op cit, 69.
- 156 Op cit, 80-81. Hodge, unwittingly, may have been bearing this out when he wrote (It's Draughty in Front, 276): "When I began broadcasting I expected to come in conflict with the B B C 'censorship', sooner or later, and be faced with the choice of saying something I didn't believe or being thrown out. But the censorship wasn't nearly as narrow as I'd supposed. At least, I didn't find it so. All that happened was an occasional discussion with the producer about the phrasing of certain paragraphs, a discussion that ended as a rule in my phrasing them a little less dogmatically than I'd originally intended. But the producer didn't insist that I should tone them down. He merely suggested that if I did so, I should probably be nearer the truth. And he usually convinced me. And I still think he was right."
- 157 A Briggs, 1965 The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Vol II The Golden Age of Wireless O U P, 148-149.
- 158 It's Draughty in Front, 272
- 159 Op cit, 278. These included a quite superb interview with John Grierson on the documentary film movement. (The Listener, 2 March, 1938, 461-462).
- 160 Op cit, 273-274.
- 161 The Listener, 3 March, 1939, 466-468:  
 "Hodge: Has a modern newspaper got a conscience?  
 Aitken: Of course the modern newspaper has a conscience. I don't know a single newspaper that doesn't consider that the good of the country comes before its material benefit. There may be varying views of course of what is considered the good of the country... but the newspaper is as much entitled to a point of view as you are to yours, and it's more likely to be correct in the long run, because it employs at high cost experts on all branches of community life...  
 Hodge: ...There's no guts, no personality in the average newspaper. Nothing downright or forthright. Why is it? What are you frightened of?  
 Aitken: Your questions make me wonder if really you ever read a newspaper..."
- 162 The Listener, 29 February, 1940, 429-430:  
 Hodge: I don't feel an artist should expect to get a living from his art - not as a right. To my mind art is essentially an amateur affair, a recreation, not a profession...When it comes to earning a living I feel (the artist) ought to be prepared to do an ordinary job of work like the rest of us.  
 Newton: 'An ordinary job of work'. But he is doing an "ordinary job of work". His is one of the most difficult jobs in the world and it certainly is a severe comment on our present-day civilisation if he can't earn a decent living by it. For Heaven's sake, Hodge, don't let's think of his job as 'a recreation not a profession.' The artist happens to be dealing in spiritual values, not in material

ones, and it happens that spiritual values have slumped a bit.

But that doesn't mean that the artist is a playboy having a bit of fun with a box of paints. The Pope didn't take that view of Michelangelo when he turned him loose on the Sistine Chapel ceiling...

- 163 Clearly the issue of writing as work (see previous note) is one that touches critics on the raw. Cp Phillip Howard's piece, mentioned above: "The writer is a worker for God's sake..."
- 164 Letter, 22 October, 1937. All letters referred to in this chapter are in the B B C Written Archive and quoted by kind permission.
- 165 A Cockney on Main Street, 29-31.
- 166 Donaldson, Margaret 1978 Children's Minds Fontana, 76, 78, 89, 93-4, 81, 113, 123-7.
- 167 Briggs, 1965, 149.
- 168 It's Draughty in Front, 268.
- 169 Op cit, 271.
- 170 Letter, 25 June, 1937,
- 171 Letter, 30 March, 1938.
- 172 It's Draughty in Front, 274-276.
- 173 Life and Letters Today, Oct 1939, 34-40.
- 174 Oct, 1939, 35-40.
- 175 Oct, 1939, 36-37.
- 176 Oct, 1939, 38, 40.
- 177 Nov 1939, 153-161. In his riposte to Hodge's essay Trevor James, while acknowledging the advantages of the 'educated writer' - though not always, perhaps, in the happiest terms - "It does - and we should be willing to admit it - come naturally to us to use the language of Shakespeare and Congreve and Pope" (154)- points out that:  
 "educated writers, have also to find our own speech - the twentieth century equivalent of that of our literary forbears...Educated till we are twenty-one, we emerge from our examinations with our minds full of reference. With our literary minds trained to much the same pitch as a Tiller girl's legs, life becomes a series of cues, to which we respond with quotation, much as a Tiller girl would with a kick. We are unable to see a thing without first being reminded of something else...We read so much before we had experienced that of which our authors wrote; when we come to experience it ourselves, we are reminded of our reading" (155, 156).
- James goes on to stress the need for every writer to work at his/her craft; then he makes some penetrating remarks (Compare Intro., Note 16) about the problem that faces the uneducated writer who has written an autobiography as to where to go next; finally he agrees with Hodge about the potential for uneducated writers to revitalise written language. However, as regards this last point, in conflating

with this the example of "Shakespeare, among other non-academic writers" (itself a special and, in the context, potentially misleading description) he somewhat clouds the issue.

178 It's Draughty in Front, 271

179 Letter, 24 September, 1937.

180 It's Draughty in Front, 273

181 30 March, 1938

182 It's Draughty in Front, 273

183 26 August, 1937.

184 1948.

185 27 October, 1952

186 It's Draughty in Front, 278

187 9 February, 1939

188 3 April, 1940

189 28 September, 1939. Hodge's perfectionism is glimpsed when, in 1952, he decides to go and stay with a cab-driver friend in Fulham to update himself on the London cab scene for a projected programme.

190 Letter to Christopher Salmon, 28 September, 1937.

This has rarely been achieved. Contrast: "The greatest breakthrough was achieved by commercial television when, in late 1960, it presented the first edition of 'Coronation Street', whose characters really did breathe the essence of working-class existence " (Marwick, Arthur, British Social History Since 1945 Penguin: London, 1982) with "The Ordsall flats are only five minutes' walk from the set of television's Coronation Street but the distance between the fiction and fact of inner city life is infinite." 'Poor Britain', Radio 4, Tuesday 17 August, 1982.

191 8 February, 1941.

192 It's Draughty in Front, 278

193 Letter to Norman Luker, 4 August, 1939.

194 Mrs J Haywood, librarian at Brunel University, remembers there being a long waiting-list for Hodge's books when she worked at the library at Kenton, Middlesex.

195 One forms the impression he would have seemed an 'ideal reader' to an organization such as the Plebs League. See What to Read: A guide for worker students The Plebs League 1923.

196 It's Draughty in Front, 159-160

Four: B L Coombes: Miner (1893-1974)

- 1 Raymond Williams 1979, 9.
- 2 It is poignant to read "I listen to the labour of their dust-clogged chests..." written when Coombes was around 45. These Poor Hands, 222.
- 3 John Lehmann (1955) 261.
- 4 See above, Ch 3.
- 5 The best source, up to 1938, is of course Coombes's These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales. The fullest account is in the entry in The Dictionary of Labour Biography (ed J M Bellamy & J Saville) vol 14, 1977, 62-65, contributed by Barbara Nield.  
  
In addition see: 'B L Coombes - this is the Story of your Success', Neath Guardian, 9 March, 1956; C John, 'He sent the Message of the Miner around the World', Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963; Philip Norman, 'The Boy who escaped from the Valley of the Witches', The Times, 29 December, 1979. Included in the (back) cover 'Author' note to Coombes's Miners Day 1945, are details (presumably supplied by Coombes) that are not available elsewhere:  
  
"Bert Lewis Coombes was born in 1894, the only son of a small farmer in Madley, Herefordshire. From the age of 14 he worked on the land and when nearly 18 went to the mines at Resolven, Glamorganshire. He drove one of the first coal-cutting machines used in Wales and has worked at most jobs underground during his 30 years' experience in mining. He has also acted as a miner's committee man and miner's welfare representative. Feeling that there was a need for a link between the miner and the outer world, he started writing in 1934 and after four years without encouragement won several literary prizes in 1939. Since then, whilst still working in the mines, he has published many short stories, books, and a large number of articles, given a score of radio talks, and made three films all on mining. B L Coombes believes that his job is to tell the world what really happens amongst the men who work out of sight below the ground. He now lives at a small farm overlooking the mining villages - so close that he often has to blow the pit dust from the paper on which he writes. He is married and has two children."
- 6 Thomas Hardy, 1895, Jude the Obscure I iii. Compare George Noakes 1977, 26: "I could see the lights of Brighton reflected in the night sky and I thought when I get a bit more time off I would go there."
- 7 These Poor Hands, 7.
- 8 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 63
- 9 These Poor Hands, 205
- 10 C John, Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963.
- 11 Neath Guardian, 9 March, 1956. Philip Norman (The Times, 29 December, 1979) states that Coombes took up writing earlier: during the General Strike of 1926.
- 12 Ibidem.

- 13 B L Coombes, quoted in Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963.
- 14 P Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979.
- 15 Neath Guardian, 9 March, 1956.
- 16 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 63; 'a big literary prize' (!) Neath Guardian, 9 March, 1956.
- 17 John Lehmann, 1955, 260-261.
- 18 Ibidem, 259.
- 19 Neath Guardian, 9 March, 1956.
- 20 Ibidem.
- 21 Quoted in Neath Guardian, 9 March 1956.
- 22 Ibidem.
- 23 See above discussion, Ch 3.
- 24 Cobbett Publishing Co Ltd
- 25 Harmondsworth: Penguin Special.
- 26 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 63-64.
- 27 Coombes was three times winner of (and shared twice) the Sir Arthur Markham Memorial Prize for miner writers (Sheffield University). In addition he won a literary competition organised by the Daily Mirror, and others.
- 28 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 64. As some attention has already been paid to the broadcasting 'channel' I omit this aspect in my consideration of B L Coombes.
- 29 Ibidem, 63.
- 30 Neath Guardian, 29 November 1940.
- 31 Those Clouded Hills, 31-32.
- 32 Coombes's energy-especially in the period 1938-1945 - must rank at least with that of more famous writers (e g Trollope, Dickens, George Eliot, Shaw, Bertrand Russell) celebrated for that quality.
- 33 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 64.
- 34 C John, Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963.
- 35 David Smith 'Underground Man: The Work of B L Coombes, "Miner Writer"' in The Anglo-Welsh Review, Winter 1974, 14.
- 36 See, for example, 'The Flame' in John Lehmann, (ed) The Penguin New Writing, No 4, March, 1941, 62-66.



- 37 F Zweig, 1948, Men in the Pits, "...South Wales, where the incidence of silicosis is the highest..." (127)
- 38 These Poor Hands, 251-257: Beata Lipman 'Bert Coombes', Planet 23, Summer, 1974, 19.
- 39 Dictionary of Labour Biography, 64: These Poor Hands, 107-129.
- 40 These Poor Hands, 108. But compare 'The Mines Today' Fortnightly 180, n 174, October, 1953. One senses an ambivalent attitude to machinery. As in the novels of Thomas Hardy (The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of Dubervilles are examples) the introduction of new machinery tends to be seen as a threat to a whole community way of life.
- 41 F Zweig, Men in the Pits, 116-117. See also Montagu Slater 1936 Stay Down Miner Martin Lawrence: "I started work in the pit in 1882. And I say that in all those years I've never known conditions in the pits as regards safety so bad as they are now...It's the speed up...You can go along the main haulage ways and see twenty, thirty, fifty yards without a pit prop...Output's all they're concerned with." (p 33:65 year old miner, 53 years underground, talking to Slater in 1935). Compare Alfred Williams, 1915, Life in a Railway Factory 2nd edition, 254-255.
- 42 The comparison is extended to include a contrast between the young miner and the old miner, predictably and overwhelmingly to the disadvantage of the former. See especially Miner's Day, 7-8. Coombes usually links what he sees as a deterioration with the transformation in mining itself. Also see Note 214 below; and F Zweig op cit Ch VI.
- 43 Eg These Poor Hands, 80-83; Miner's Day, 96; Those Clouded Hills, 19-20.
- 44 Those Clouded Hills, 19.
- 45 These Poor Hands, 82.
- 46 These Poor Hands, 82.
- 47 These Poor Hands, 102-103. See also 'I am a Miner', 35.
- 48 Men are treated as expendable: "There is no place in our industry for the ill or injured, no matter how that incapacity may be caused. A working man is only of any value as long as he can do a hard day's work: when he cannot keep up the pace, he is an encumbrance". (These Poor Hands, 222) So, with miners' bitterly reluctant acquiescence, are animals: "Often a man must choose between forcing an exhausted horse and being sent home and on the dole - with consequent suffering to his family. He must choose whether the horse shall suffer, or his wife and children". (These Poor Hands, 56). So also the land and landscape of the valleys: "The old wharfs are idle and rotting; the old mills can scarcely be found amongst the trees and fern. Copper works, iron works, brick works; I see their ruins every day, and the tips from old and disused collieries. When are we going to make it compulsory that he who despoils a place must renew its beauty? Now it seems that anyone can come along, scatter horror and destruction until the chance of profit is gone, and then go away from the sight of his crime..." (Miner's Day, 115)  
On the issue of class-and-animal-exploitation compare Durham miner

Harold Heslop's 1935 novel Last Cage Down 23ff; Jessica Mitford's characterisation of concern for animals as "upper-classishness" Hons and Rebels 1960, 116-117; and Keith Thomas 1983 Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800: "Kindness to animals was a luxury which not everyone had learnt to afford." (186) Compare also Daisy Noakes The Town Beehive, 15.

- 49 See These Poor Hands, 215-216: "...it was arranged for the colliery to borrow trucks and we worked - for half a shift. That half shift prevented us drawing three days' dole, and as we were on the border-line of the compliance period, it meant that we had to lose another six waiting days before we could draw. I earned four and six that day, less bus fare. I would have drawn fourteen and sixpence if we had not worked, and would have kept my waiting time in compliance. As it was I had to lose six waiting days - twenty-nine shillings and the three days' pay - fourteen and sixpence - for the pleasure of going underground and earning four and sixpence." Zweig (op cit, 158) sets the scarcity of jobs in context: "...an industry which lost in the inter-war period one-third of its manpower and one-fifth of its gross output, closed and abandoned more than 1,000 pits..."
- 50 See G T Gregory 1979, 39-40.
- 51 For example, Those Clouded Hills, 25-26.
- 52 Zweig (op cit) 162; 'I am a Miner' (Fact No 23, Feb 1939) 17, 35.
- 53 20ff. See also Miner's Day, 24, 27.
- 54 'The Mines Today', Fortnightly, 180, n s 174, October 1953, 245.
- 55 These Poor Hands, 86 Cp 'I am a Miner', 43-44. The technical point is explained by David Smith ('Underground Man: the work of B L Coombes, "Miner Writer"', Anglo-Welsh Review, Winter, 1974, 16) and put into the context of what was happening in the South Wales coalfield.
- 56 These Poor Hands, 27. Compare, 'Looking for the Working Class', Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook, in New Society, 9 September, 1982: "Another told the story of her grandfather who had been killed at work, because in order to speed production in the factory, the safety guards had been removed from the machines he was working. She told how the company had suborned a man to give false evidence that the safety guards had been in place. As a result, the accident was deemed to have been her grandfather's own fault, and so no compensation was given. Years later, this fellow-worker had called on the grandmother, overcome with remorse. He said he had been told he would have lost his job if he had refused to perjure himself; and, being black, would have been unlikely ever to have found another at that time in the East End." See also above; and Lew Lessen, in Working Lives I, Centerprise, 1976, 17.
- 57 W Labov 1972 Language in the Inner City, 366-375.
- 58 These Poor Hands, 134.
- 59 Frequently a radical direction to take. The protestant Reformation was grounded on the 'purity' of the early church from which the Catholic Church was seen to have 'deviated'; Edward Bellamy's

Utopian novel is called Looking Backward; William Norris wrote A Dream of John Ball about the past as well as News from Nowhere about the future.

- 60 'I am a Miner', 64-65.
- 61 Those Clouded Hills, 63-64. Cp Zweig, op cit, 159 on the proliferation of 'gaffers' after nationalization.
- 62 'This is the Problem', Picture Poet, 10, 4 January, 1941.
- 63 Letter, The Times, 8 January, 1980.
- 64 Those Clouded Hills, 1
- 65 'The Way we Live Now - I' in The Penguin New Writing Vol II, ed John Lehmann, January, 1941, 12.
- 66 Those Clouded Hills, 13.
- 67 Miner's Day, 120: "He has no jacket pocket on the left side at all, and only a few crumbs mingling with the shreds of cloth show what the rats have left of his food, although he hung it so high and so carefully." Cp William Muckle, No Regrets, (People's Publications), 1981: "Many times when you went for your bait there was a hole right through the paper into your bread and the mouse would still be in your pocket." (24)
- 68 'I am a Miner', 8.
- 69 e g 'I am a Miner': "We capture the mountain air and force it into the middle of the mountain to help us rob the mountain of the treasure that is stored there." (15) 'The Way we Live Now - I' (At night and in wartime blackout)...now the inside of the earth is better lighted than the outside." (14)
- 70 F Zweig, op cit, 38.
- 71 These Poor Hands, 274.
- 72 Those Clouded Hills, 59-60
- 73 F Zweig, op cit, 28.
- 74 'I am a Miner', 65.
- 75 'Better Off', Left Review Vol 3, No 14, March, 1938, 872.
- 76 Those Clouded Hills, 44
- 77 Those Clouded Hills, 10; These Poor Hands, 27.
- 78 Those Clouded Hills, 66
- 79 e g 'I am a Miner', 11.
- 80 Miner's Day, 78; These Poor Hands, 40-42; 'I am a Miner', 9-10.

(Coombes's point about the shift worker trying to sleep in spite of "the cries of hawkers, the noise of the wireless, and the cries of children" recalls vividly my own childhood with a shift-worker railwayman father: we willing our neighbours to hold their conversations elsewhere than beneath his window, learning how to move about and shut doors silently, etc).

- 81 E g 'I am a miner', 50-51.
- 82 Greatly increased and increasing. See These Poor Hands, 166ff; 'I am a Miner' 7-10 , 36-37.
- 83 Phillip Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979.
- 84 See above discussion and Note 32.
- 85 See below.
- 86 cp F Zweig, op cit, Chs XXI, XXIII,XXXIV.
- 87 Philip Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979.
- 88 Miner's Day, 86.
- 89 cp. Zweig (op cit) "All sorts of comics, like Family Comics or Merry Maker Comic or Happy Times,are in great demand, not only for juveniles, but also for young men, and occasionally you can see on the pit-bottom someone reading a comic on a better-lit roadway during the break. Lately a great wave of cheap,rubbishy stories has invaded the mining villages,and at the stalls in any market you can see those booklets, in exciting paper covers with glaring titles, changing hands like hot cakes." (108)
- 90 e g These Poor Hands, 139-141. Compare Alice Linton (1982,13) reminiscing about her school days during World War I.
- 91 e g 'You Are Being Watched', Coal Vol 1, No 4, August 1947, 18; These Poor Hands, Ch 12.
- 92 e g These Poor Hands, 224-226; 146ff.
- 93 'You are Being Watched' (NB "We have the welfare parks and libraries to sweeten and cleanse our minds") Below I refer to Coombes's stance towards external nature.
- 94 These Poor Hands, 224-225.
- 95 e g 'I am a Miner', 56-57; Those Clouded Hills, 7
- 96 Those Clouded Hills, 67-69.
- 97 e g Miner's Day, 87
- 98 These Poor Hands, 134
- 99 'I'm a Miner,' 56. See also The Neath Guardian 10 January, 1941, 6 cp Hello, Are You Working? Strong Words, 1977, 18-19.

- 100 'A Farm on Your Doorstep, Coal, Vol 2, Part 5, Sept 1948, 16-17;  
Those Clouded Hills, 69ff.
- 101 Op cit, 21.
- 102 Those Clouded Hills, 77
- 103 These Poor Hands, 166-167
- 104 These Poor Hands, 167.
- 105 Bernard Sharratt, 1973, 24ff.
- 106 Those Clouded Hills, 65
- 107 'You are Being Watched', Coal, Vol 1, No 4, 18 Aug 1947.
- 108 Raymond Williams, 1973.
- 109 This informs his solitary writing activity, rugged independence as a small holder and autodidact, and so on.
- 110 Especially in his commitment to trade union activity, the proposals concerning work organisation referred to above, his belief in the importance of discussion (implicit in the book recommendations in his Neath Guardian column: for example on 29 Nov, 1940 ex-miner Roger Dattall's The Plain Man and the Novel is proffered as "very suitable for discussion groups").
- 111 The Road to Wigan Pier Gollancz 1936.
- 112 eg Walter Brierley, 1937 Sandwich Man.
- 113 From a Pitman's Notebook 1925. See Appendix Seven.
- 114 The Whispering Gallery 1955 260. See also New Writing in Europe 1940 Penguin: "absolute simplicity and sincerity...no sensational colouring" (84-85).
- 115 These Poor Hands, 169.
- 116 'I am a Miner', 25.
- 117 These Poor Hands, 144
- 118 Those Clouded Hills, 24
- 119 'I am a Miner', 7, Cp. Alfred Williams's discussion of the working year, week and day, and workers' strategies for negotiating them in Life in a Railway Factory 1920, 217. See also Jeremy Seabrook, 1978 What Went Wrong? 194-196.
- 120 Miner's Day, 11 This is a favourite detail. cp 'I am a Miner', 24 and, interestingly, the 1950 short story 'The Opening Door' (Coal Vol 4, No 6, 30), where the detail is put to narrative use appropriate to fiction: "Funny, Smut," he said to the dog who had sat down waiting for these operations to be finished. 'Funny, ain't it, how you can tell the men who work in each stall. By their

smell. That's it, Bob North works here and he's always got chewing gum on the go. Can smell it still although he's at home. Wish he'd left a packet for me.' Tom Stile's place this', he told Smut at the next stall. 'Brilliantine on his hair. Can't you smell it? Bet he'll soon be putting on an extra dose so's to meet Sally Kirk tonight. I'll just put my signature on this bit of gob wall.' 'Ned Davies's place here - him with that greyhound that's always snarling at you. Bet he's got it out on the mountain now. Enjoying themselves whilst you and me are down here in the dark, old fellow. I'll stick the date on his shovel here. Keeps a good set of tools always, Ned do. Can smell that Franklins he chews.'"

- 121 These Poor Hands, 36
- 122 These Poor Hands, 87 Coombes, is of course, not alone in finding difficulties with how, and how often to render non-standard dialect. cp Tobias Smollett, 1748 Roderick Random (eg chapter 11 - the speech of Joey a waggon driver); G B Shaw, 1899 Captain Brassbound's Conversion Odhams, 1934, (the speech of Drinkwater).
- 123 The Development of Writing Activities 11-18: Writing Research Unit Schools Council, 1974.
- 124 "Now I see a belting in use which is far less noisy and more easily shifted. They just pull out the steel locking pins and roll the belting up in lengths like stair carpets. Then the roller cradles are moved across one yard and the black carpet unwound over the cradles, the steel pins are reinserted, the conveyor engine is drawn across and the tension posts set at their angle, and all is ready for another stretch of coal to be conveyed into the trams at the end. Chocks have been placed in the cut under the coal to stop pressure clogging the cutting chain of the machine. These are withdrawn when coal-filling is to start and the coal comes down with more or less difficulty. It all depends on the skill, sometimes the luck, of the collier. With the coal down the assistants or the boys turn it just behind them on to that moving belt which takes it along with a black river." Miner's Day, 102.
- 125 Those Clouded Hills, 30 The intrusive "but" wrecks the rhythmic force of this colloquialism; "advise" substituted for "tell" needs no comment.
- 126 Those Clouded Hills, 50
- 127 At the level of diction consider 'encumbered' (Those Clouded Hills, 8) 'chronicler' (Those Clouded Hills, 3); of stilted phrasing: "The end of that eight hours was very soon my fondest wish" (These Poor Hands, 35) and "Beneath this building, screens is the naming, run seven sets of rails each holding a row of trucks ready for loading" (my emphasis), and "There is a feeling that one is part of a community and of some value in the sight of others" (as often with Hardy a Biblical flavour here). In respect of larger decisions notice a marked resemblance, including tonally, between Coombes's piece in the Neath Guardian 7 February 1941 recalling the old pattern of events in agricultural districts where farm labourers moved themselves, their families and possessions from one tied cottage to another on 2nd February, and Hardy's treatment of similar events (he says on "Lady Day, Old Style, April 6") in 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' (The Portable Thomas Hardy - Selected and with an Introduction by Julian Moynahan, Penguin, 1977, 714 ff) an essay

written in 1883, and in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, MacMillan, 1891, Ch 52. Also a tendency, already noted, to parabolic illustration: "There was an ancient legend about the mythical god who was all powerful whilst he had his feet on the ground, and could draw fresh strength from continual contact with the soil. His enemies persuaded him to abandon this early touching (another Hardy phrase?) and he soon lost all strength" (The context of this is, not surprisingly, a discussion of the need for socialist leaders to keep in touch with the grass-roots, with rank-and-file people and experience etc) (Neath Guardian, 11 May 1962, 5) Compare also his journey home, injured, from the mine (These Poor Hands, 165) with Fanny Robin's journey to the poor-house at Casterbridge (Far from the Madding Crowd, MacMillan, 1874, Ch 40); the staggering, Hardy-type coincidence on which the short story 'Bitter Mischief' (Coal, Vol 4, No 1, May, 1950, 30-31) depends - as well as its general patterning. Notice the striking correspondence between Coombes gazing out and being drawn towards - the lights of Dowlais and Hardy's Jude (see note 6 above) towards Christminster. (Jude the Obscure is among a few titles Coombes speaks of as in the bookcase he made in a wood-work class - These Poor Hands, 221) Compare, finally, his love of describing great sweeps of landscape and dot-like people moving across them with abundant similar examples in Hardy - for example in the first half of Far from the Madding Crowd.

128 See above, 5: Neath Guardian, 27 Dec 1940; 30 July, 1971

129 'I am a Miner', 62.

130 Those Clouded Hills, 56

131 "...Men find their mates by calling with subdued voices as if sound, too, was forbidden. They are doubtful of a shadow near their shoulder until the voice reassures them. Finally they merge together, a black army in the complete darkness, and start to tramp upwards along a narrow lane to their colliery./On the right, far below them, a flooded river hisses and splashes. The sound of huge stones being rolled along by the water echoes up to the men..." The Penguin New Writing Vol II ed John Lehman, January, 1941, 9.

132 Charles Parker's term.

133 These Poor Hands, 55. A passage on pp228-229 is similarly uneven.

134 "...away from the dirt of the village...there was a wonderful valley sheltered by mountains that made me gasp with amazement... The sun was warm in a blue sky and we heard the song of many birds...It was a grand day in a grand setting...Farther along the rhododendrons were massed in flower, like scarlet soldiers...Above it all the moon looked like a pearl button on an immense blue cloth..." (These Poor Hands, Miners Day; 'Sabbath Night' in Folios of New Writing.) 'Underground Man: The work of B L Coombes, "Miner Writer"' David Smith The Anglo-Welsh Review Vol 24, No 53, Winter, 1974, 22

135 Ibidem.

136 Unlike a lady who worried that Dannie Abse was not a real poet because he did not write about 'nature' (the Wordsworthian fallacy?) Anecdote told by the poet at Shoreditch College, 1972.

137 Hence fragments like the following (from Alan Sillitoe's short story 'The Bike' 1968 A Sillitoe Selection, 8)

are all the more surprising and welcome: "I rode a dozen miles out into the country, where fresh air smelt like cowshit..."

- 138 See Raymond Williams, 1973, 87-90.
- 139 In G T Gregory, 1979, 194.
- 140 Barry Heath (1981) M'Mam Sez, Introduction.
- 141 These Poor Hands: The Autobiography of a Miner Working in South Wales
- 142 See above, Ch 3. It seems likely (though probably not susceptible of proof either way) either that Coombes borrowed the idea from Hodge - or that the editorial board of Fact recommended it to both 'witnesses'. The same device is used in Jack Common, (ed) (1938; 1978) Seven Shifts by Jack Hilton, 34-41.
- 143 W Labov, 1972, Language in the Inner City, 366-375.
- 144 In G T Gregory, 1979, 205-206
- 145 As examples his pieces in the April 27, 1962 and 1 June, 1962 issues contrast nicely. The former - which opens with an objection to appointments as heads of the N C B and British Railways of men lacking knowledge and experience of these industries, moves on to a disgraceful surplus of milk (and proposals to pour hundreds of thousands of gallons down disused pits) and finally to shortages of potatoes - is a skilful piece of journalism, covering a lot in under a thousand words and achieving unity through the common theme of bad management. The latter starts with moles "the enemy in the garden" (respect for their strength and delicacy; hard to remove etc) and moves to a mention of miners (who usually crop up in his Neath Guardian pieces) - but not in terms of the expected mole/miner analogy: rather in somewhat creaking references to miners as erstwhile wearers of moleskin trousers (!) "hard-wearing but not nice to the nose" and fallen from favour because "the heat in pit-head baths made them crack".
- 146 The starting-point of my thinking about this problematic issue is Johnson, Richard "Really Useful Knowledge": radical education and working-class culture, 1790-1848' (eds) Clarke, J, Critcher, C and Johnson R, 1979.
- 147 Cp Coombes's remarks in 'Below the Tower' in Folios of New Writing Spring, 1941 (London: The Hogarth Press) in response to a paper 'The Leaning Tower' Virginia Woolf read to the W E A in Brighton, May, 1940 (Both are discussed below) "It is also true that a great proportion of the working class have no facility in either reading or writing, as yet, and none of them have much money or influence. If one moves about in their homes it is surprising how few can write a decent letter; even in this war we are told of the many classes started to learn (sic) soldiers how to read and write. Watch a Trade Union secretary at his job and note how he has to help his members." (32)
- 148 See Ch 9



- 149 Assuming clear distinctions between fiction, autobiography, documentary and so on is obviously naive. The issues are complex. Fiction itself offers a spectrum of 'characters' from naturalistically-rendered, sharply-realised individuals to 'types'. However, at the fictive end of the continuum writers admit to offering composites (sometimes with libel action in mind) - and readers at some level assume this - while at other points along the continuum the expectations of both are different.
- 150 John Kenyon (The Observer, 17 April, 1983) reviewing (eds) Hobsbawn, E and Ranger, T (1983) The Invention of Tradition summarises Prys Morgan's piece: "Welsh national dress, the Welsh harp, the cult of the Druids, the establishment of the eisteddfod, the revival of a despised and half-forgotten language, the whole concept of Wales as the 'Land of Song', were the conscious creation of a band of dedicated patriots determined to preserve the identity of Wales as a separate nation. Their success has been astounding."
- 151 Miners Day, 9
- 152 cp. Cymbeline, I.i opening sixty or so lines, the openings of As You Like It and The Winter's Tale; and, famously, The Tempest I ii.
- 153 Miners Day, 18
- 154 Miners Day, 19
- 155 Miners Day, 21
- 156 Miners Day, 21
- 157 See above Note 94.
- 158 As I draft this I am re-reading Emma by Jane Austen. The ball and strawberry-picking scenes provide unlikely but useful parallels in the house of fiction. That there was 'mileage' of various sorts in 'pay-day' is confirmed by D H Lawrence's use of it in Sons and Lovers (Ch IV) and his short-story 'Strike Pay'.
- 159 Characteristically blunted, it seems to me, by what he adds after "pay-day" and before the semi-colon. With Coombes, as perhaps with most writers, economy and understatement tend to be virtues.
- 160 cp a similar theme-strand running through the work of the Welsh poet R S Thomas. For example: 'The Labourer', 'A Welsh Testament': "I saw them stare/From their long cars, as I passed knee-deep/In ewes and wethers..." in ed E L Black (1966) Nine Modern Poets: an Anthology
- 161 These Poor Hands, 231
- 162 Op cit, 235
- 163 See below, Note 173
- 164 These Poor Hands, 243. All this hidden by miners forbidden to take such items into the pit.
- 165 Op cit, 244-245. Compare Robert Lowery's description of a girl seen at a meeting at Carlisle (138)
- 166 Compare Note 56 above.
- 167 These Poor Hands, 229

- 168 Op cit, 246
- 169 Compare the pervasive use of present tense in the oral narratives of London working-class speakers.
- 170 A term devised by Randolph Quirk, 1959 Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language, referred to in J C Reid 1967 Charles Dickens: Little Dorrit.
- 171 Examples abound in Shakespeare. The Tempest I. ii. features extended use of the device.
- 172 For example in Far from the Madding Crowd (eg Ch 9) and The Mayor of Casterbridge (eg Chs 13, 37).
- 173 "One of the bagatelle players makes a stroke, then looks around for our appreciation. He notices the newcomer for the first time; the words of banter are choked in his throat. He stares for some seconds, then whispers to his neighbour, and I hear the words he uses:-  
 'God in heaven, Jack! What's the matter with that chap, eh? He looks devilish bad, that he do. Didn't ought to be about in that state. Took bad in the street, I s'pose, and thought as a drink would liven him up, I expect.'  
 'Where've you been living lately?' his mate asks. 'Don't you know a chap as have got silicosis when you sees him?'  
 'Silicosis? Phew!' the other gasped. 'His face looks like a dead man's face, that it do.'  
 'Won't be long first,' his mate replied. 'I've seen enough of it to know as he can't last long.' These Poor Hands, 234.
- 174 These Poor Hands, 231-232. Coombes at his stylistic worst.
- 175 These Poor Hands, 245-246. Note the physical characteristic Coombes attaches to Billy - like Inigo Jollifant tossing back his unruly hair in The Good Companions by J B Priestley, or Mr Dick jingling his loose change (David Copperfield, Charles Dickens).
- 176 Bernard Sharratt, 1982, 263-264. The "category term" "imaginative literature" used here coincides, perhaps, with that referred to - and distinguished from other meanings of the term - by Raymond Williams: "the important but narrow sense of printed imaginative writing of a certain quality..."
- In John Barrell, 1982 An Equal, Wide Survey: English Literature in History 1730-1780 Editor's Introduction, 9.
- 177 Philip Norman, 'The boy who escaped from the Valley of the Witches', The Times, 29 December, 1979.
- 178 Victor Gollancz, quoted in John Lewis, 1970 The Left Book Club: An Historical Record Gollancz, 94, and in Jon Clark, et al (eds). (1979) Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties
- 179 Betty Reid, 'The Left Book Club in the Thirties' in Jon Clark, 1979, 205.
- 180 For example, Means Test Man by Walter Brierley (Methuen); Love on the Dole by Walter Greenwood (Dent); The Other Story of Coal by T J Parry Jones (Allen & Unwin); Jew Boy by Simon Blumenfeld (Cape, who also published Jack Hilton); East End my Cradle by

Willie Goldman (Faber); A City Stirs by Ashley Smith (Chapman & Hall).

- 181 Philip Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979.
- 182 David Smith, 'Underground Man: the work of B L Coombes, "Miner Writer"', Anglo-Welsh Review, Winter 1974, 14-15.
- 183 John Lehmann, 1940 New Writing in Europe, 26ff.
- 184 Ibid, 26.
- 185 Ibid, 27.
- 186 Ibid, 28.
- 187 John Lehmann, 1955, The Whispering Gallery, 232.
- 188 Ibid, 236.
- 189 Ibid, 284.
- 190 Ibid, 237.
- 191 Ibid 233.
- 192 Ibid, 280.
- 193 Ibid, 258-259. The passage is quoted below.
- 194 For example, Victor Gollancz, John Allen, members of the Fact board, John Middleton Murry. Douglas Garman, Edgell Rickword, Montague Slater. Jack Common, himself an important working-class writer, was published extensively (eg in The Adelphi) through the 1930s and besides coming to work for The Adelphi himself became a literary 'midwife' in 1938 when he coaxed pieces from working-class friends and edited what emerged into Seven Shifts, Secker & Warburg.
- 195 John Lehmann (1955) The Whispering Gallery, 261.
- 196 eg plasterer Leslie Halward, seamen George Garrett and James Hanley, Jim Phelan, John Sommerfield, Willie Goldman and pseudonymous engine driver Leonard York.
- 197 See Lehmann's discussion of these and other working-class writers in New Writing in Europe, 83-91.
- 198 Phillip Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979
- 199 See his designation, heading the Neath Guardian column: originally "Author of 'These Poor Hands' , etc."; then "Neath Valley Miner-Author"; finally "Miner-Author".
- 200 There are, of course, semantic problems bound up with the distinction book/non-book. However, the formats of Fact magazine volumes, editions of New Writing (referred to by John Lehmann as a "book-magazine" - in New Writing in Europe, 77) and Miners Day (a "war-time economy Penguin Special") most readily suggest the category 'book' whereas Coal and, obviously, the Neath Guardian do not.

- 201 'Bitter Mischief' Coal, Vol 4, No 1, May, 1950.
- 202 Discussing one of his contributors, George Orwell, John Lehmann makes a generalisation that bears interestingly on these matters: "(Orwell) is not really a novelist, and all his novels are thinly disguised chapters of autobiography or dramatic tracts to drive home a comment on society he wishes to make; he is not essentially interested in the creation of character. And in this he is thoroughly typical of the 'thirties, where the boundary dividing creative writing from reporting becomes at times so difficult to define." (My emphasis)  
New Writing in Europe, 81-82. For a subtle and important discussion of the 'problematics' around the ideas of reportage, documentary, fact, fiction, realism etc in relation to precisely the period and some of the texts mentioned here see Laing, Stuart (1980) 'Presenting "Things as they are": John Sommerfield's May Day and Mass Observation' in Frank Gloversmith (ed) Class Culture and Social Change: A New View of the 1930s Ch 5, 142-160
- 203 Lewis Jones 1937 Cwmardy, republished 1978; 1939 We Live republished 1978.
- 204 See David Smith 1982 Lewis Jones for an extended discussion of the use which Jones makes of the history of the South Wales coalfield during the period covered by the novels.
- 205 Lewis Jones 1937 Cwmardy, Foreword.
- 206 Loc cit
- 207 In respect of Coombes see above; Jones's energy is clear from his journal: See David Smith 1982, 23.
- 208 Lewis Jones 1937 Loc cit.
- 209 Raymond Williams 1979 The Welsh Industrial Novel, 9
- 210 See Carole Snee, 1979 'Working Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in (ed) J Clark et al Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties and D Smith, 1982. Compare William Golding 'Word Power' The Guardian, 10 December, 1983, 17: "Put simply, the novel stands between us and the hardening concept of statistical man. There is no other medium in which we can live for so long and so intimately with a character. That is the service a novel renders. It performs no less an act than the rescue and the preservation of the individuality and dignity of the single being, be it man, women or child. No other art, I claim, can so thread in and out of a single mind and body, so live another life. It does ensure that at the very least a human being shall be seen to be more than just one billionth of one billion."
- 211 For example, the Daily Worker original reviews attacked Brierley for his portrayal of unemployment as depoliticising rather than radicalising, and Love on the Dole for leaving workers in a "blind alley". Recently Carole Snee's critique (Clarke, 1979) - similar in some respects - has been rebutted in Andy Croft's Introduction to the republished Means Test Man. (Here I am greatly in the debt of Andy Croft for his papers at Barlaston and Manchester (1983) and London (1984).)

- 212 See Fact No 8, November, 1937, 'Portrait of a Mining Town' - an enquiry into grim conditions in Nantyglo and Blaina; also Massey's Industrial South Wales, Gollancz, 1940, which Coombes (Neath Guardian, 22 November, 1940) warmly recommended to his readers - not to buy (9s, "beyond the ordinary reader") but to borrow from the library.
- 213 Stay Down Miner, 1936, Martin Lawrence - "...Number One of a series of REPORTAGE books." Slater arrived in Cwmfelinfach shortly after the end of the celebrated 7-day 'stay down strike' (which spread through the South Wales coalfield until the original 80 miners involved swelled to 34,000). His 81-page monograph is unequivocally workerist. Of the wife of one of the 'stay-down' protagonists he writes: "I thought Mrs Jones's voice was like a bassoon. I mean it had that richness of emphasis... When her dark eyes were flashing fire her voice remained low and steady, though you felt a sort of muscular grip she put on her words. Strength! - but you'll hear." (2-3). From the accounts of such witnesses Slater pieces together - in an aftermath that saw among other developments that attempt to instate the non-strike 'Industrial Union' that Big Jim is pressurized to join in the aftermath of the failed strike in We Live (We Live, Lewis Jones, 1939, 181, 183) - a narrative of what has happened in Cwmfelinfach. The book is at the same time a record of what he observed, his impressions and reactions. He emerges as an intrepid traveller/anthropologist addressing outsiders: "Cwmfelinfach, pronounce it like this: Cumvelin-vach...a village, you'd say, as big as the threepenny bit I have just had in change from the 'bus conductor. (One of the features of travel in South Wales is the great number of threepenny bits among the change." (1) "They still talk like Fluellen in Monmouthshire. But they don't say 'look you.' They say 'look'." What is more he appears to assume a certain common ground with his readers - "The Rhondda is more melodramatic than the Western Valley - mountains that seem ready to fall down on the traveller, as 'Christian' in The Pilgrim's Progress thought Mount Sinai would fall on him while he was on his way to the village of 'Morality'. 'There came also flashes of fire out of the hill,' says Bunyan. One almost expects the same of the Rhondda mountains!" (67) In one instance it is very specific metropolitan common ground indeed: "I had some little difficulty in finding his offices, but traced them eventually to premises such as might house an old-fashioned solicitor in one of the streets behind Bedford Row (28) As Slater's stay in Cwmfelinfach - and account of it - lengthen out "we" comes to supercede "they" (E.g. his description of the strike meeting he attends - (63), the moving experience of hymn singing - of which he remarks "I was beginning to see why they sing hymns in Wales these days as if they were fighting songs".) As well as in respect of its implied readership Slater's book is of interest to the present study in that it offers thumbnail sketches of a mining community (stressing the interdependence, for example of miners, shops, pubs - and compare the fate of shopkeepers Mr and Mrs Evans Cardi in We Live) sketches that while close in time and place to Coombes's subject matter yet come from a perspective utterly remote from his. Slater makes points explicitly ("Just as the mine is always there, the people are always dimly conscious of the challenge to nature it stands for. In a mining village there is no suffocating sense of domesticity being the whole of life. We leave that to town suburbs." An interesting "we"; a similar drift is implicit in Coombes's reportage. Finally, Slater's approach to reportage is distinctly fictive/dramatic/cinematic. He 'cuts' scenes together in which (with authorial omniscience) he portrays

protagonists in the drama (miners, their families, police, pit manager) making their dispositions, wondering anxiously what will happen - a question that is "Troubling the office too. The lights are on. The manager is keeping vigil: telephoning a good deal it seems - and wondering what the devil to do...He stays most of the evening and has no ideas". (Slater transformed the event and his report of it into a play that was staged by Left Theatre in May, 1936. (See Andre Van Gysegheem 'British Theatre in the Thirties' in Jon Clark et al (eds) 1979). The blend of genres, of 'literature' and reportage and so on discussed elsewhere in this chapter, adds further weight to John Lehmann's view (Lehmann, 1940, 82) that it was "thoroughly typical of the 'thirties (for) the boundary dividing creative writing from reporting (to be) at times so difficult to define."

- 214 Especially in its early years. For an example see 22 November, 1940.
- 215 As example of the importance of Lehmann to Coombes see the anecdotes in Philip Norman's article in The Times 29 December 1979.
- 216 New Writing in Europe, 86
- 217 Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963
- 218 See Intro., Note 16. Consider also Roald Dahl's remark (Start the Week, BBC R4, 9 May, 1983): "Autobiography is easier..."
- 219 "I'm just starting my seventeenth. It's about life below stairs again, but this time it's fiction; I've run out of non-fiction." The Sunday Times (Colour Supplement) 17 April, 1983.
- 220 Bernard Sharratt 1973 85-86.
- 221 For example, These Poor Hands, 140-141
- 222 Eg Miners Day, 86
- 223 David Smith 1974 21.
- 224 One account of this might portray Coombes as an exemplary product of the kind of education system the early architects of state education envisaged:

"The lower classes ought to be educated to discharge the duties cast upon them. They should also be educated that they may appreciate and defer to a higher cultivation when they meet it: and the higher classes ought to be educated in a very different manner, in order that they may exhibit to the lower classes that higher education to which, if it were shown to them, they would bow and defer." Robert Lowe, Primary and Classical Education, 1867, Edinburgh: Edmonton and Douglas, 32, cited in Gordon P and Lawton, D Curriculum Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries 1978, 183.

- 225 Broadly speaking within a tradition exemplified/expressed in both life and literature by such figures as the eponymous Adam Bede of George Eliot's novel; Robert Tressell and his hero Frank Owen; 'The Golden Dustman' in William Morris's News from Nowhere; Roger Dattler's characters Edward Holiday (Uncouth Swain) and Ralph Saunders (Steel Saraband)- but above all by Roger Dattler himself (see Appendix Six). See also the miner/leader of the 'stay-down strike' referred to by Montagu Slater (1936): "I sat by the big fire in his parlour, read part of a manuscript novel, some short

stories, his poems, and finally an account he had written of the stay-down strike". (75) Slater goes on to say of him: "He is tall, 'upright', as somebody says, 'with a conscious rectitude.' And what above all is impressive, is a certain genuineness and strength of feeling, feeling that is, perhaps, over-cultivated - for such is the tendency, I think, both in Welsh and other chapels." (76)

- 226 This is the major theme of Walter Brierley's Sandwich Man. Arthur Gardner attracts resentment from his step-father and from workmates for trying to escape the pit through miner's scholarship day-release study at Trentingham University. (The Lawrence correspondences are strong, implicitly and explicitly, throughout the novel).
- 227 Miners Day, 40-41, for example, where he portrays himself as mentor and counsellor to colleagues .
- 228 The sort of person, one feels, Virginia Woolf has in mind in 'The Leaning Tower' (discussed below).
- 229 Those Clouded Hills, 1-3
- 230 This crops up elsewhere in Coombes. See Miners Day, 7; Those Hills, 18-19 - the latter including accounts of vandalism that help put modern problems in this respect into perspective. See also Slater, M, 1936: after an old miner has lamented the increased dangers in pit work (see note 41 above) a young miner replies - "Of course - yes, there's often no timbering for fifty yards...But you've got to move these days, you've got to get the stuff out." Slater adds the incantation: "Move with the times, starve with the times (forty-seven and six in a week for a man in full work), and die with the times under a fallen rock." (34)
- 231 'You are Being Watched', Coal, Vol 1, No 4, August, 1947. The piece starts like a short story. The narrator and a grey-suited man are alone in a railway carriage. A group of miners homebound from the pit have just left the carriage at the last stop: "we had heard that colliery officials were the slimiest rogues possible, only to be outfrauded by the federation officials, and in that shouting, bawling argument the dispute had ranged between the virtue of film stars and the treachery of miners' agents. Not one reasoned argument had been produced, nor any evidence offered. Every third word was obscene. Everyone, so they stated, was out for himself, and no one - except that group - was any adjectival good. The traveller...shook his handkerchief as if to wave away a memory. 'And so,' he commented, 'those are the fellows who think themselves fit to control industry. To control our country, in fact.' 'Oh, come now, 'I argued, 'they're only a small section. You mustn't judge all by them. There are fine men among the miners.' 'The noisiest section usually dominates the rest,' he ended..." The anecdote ends. Coombes speculates on factors of upbringing (in an era of unemployment - "Such things are bound to leave their marks on men's minds") that give rise to such behaviour. He then stresses the importance of education and "the cultural side": "We now have some villages where the cultural side is fostered and the evenings are busy with well-selected classes. The contrast in the behaviour of youth, and the middle-aged, in such a village with that of a neighbouring place where nothing

has been done is amazing. The whole atmosphere and outlook of the community are changed. And as the love for good literature, good drama, and good music is slowly fostered and seeps into the feelings of the adults they take those influences into their homes and the little children absorb it. Thus the way is made easier and brighter for the coming generation until it feels that such cultural pleasures are part of life." Nowhere does Coombes 'place' himself more firmly on questions of education, culture, the moral force of encounters with 'good literature' etc.

- 232 See above, ch 3. Presumably his piece for Picture Post groups itself, in this respect, with his radio work.
- 233 George Orwell 1936 Gollancz; Republished 1959 Secker & Warburg, 36.
- 234 John Lehmann 1955 The Whispering Gallery, 258-259.
- 235 Quoted in the Merseyside Writers Committee's Liverpool 1921-1922 George Garrett. Recently over 200 pages of Garrett's autobiography (as typed originally by Jerry Dawson) came to light - classically, in a Liverpool attic. Garrett apparently grew disillusioned with publishing in The Adelphi, New Writing and so on - reaching a largely middle-class readership - and threw his energy into Merseyside Left/Unity Theatre.
- 236 Jack Common (ed) Seven Shifts, ix
- 237 Phillip Norman, The Times, 29 December, 1979
- 238 These Clouded Hills, 44
- 239 Those Clouded Hills, 51
- 240 See, eg, Philip Norman The Times, 29 December, 1979
- 241 Those Clouded Hills, 59ff
- 242 Harold Heslop (1935) Last Cage Down, 294. Negative class attitudes towards writing and related language activity are discussed further below. Meanwhile note Herbert Hodge: "I was a little ashamed of admitting I was trying to write at all."; Roger Dattler (Appendix Six) "It's all book knowledge," said one chap the other night. I'll bet you bloke can't make a rabbit hutch." 'E's none so daft', returned another; 'e gets 'is livin wi'out workin' an' that's more'n you or me can do!"; Willie Goldman: "My brothers, who are in the clothing trade, unfortunately still have to do a great deal of work from time to time. But they claim, proudly, that I, who am a 'writer', have brought the family tradition of loafing to its logical conclusion." (A Saint in the Making, quoted in Ken Worpole's Dockers and Detectives 1983, Verso, 109; one of the painters in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists observes: "Look at them there Labour members of Parliament - a lot of b--rs what's too bloody lazy to work for their livin'! What the bloody 'ell was they before they got there? Only workin' men, the same as you and me! But they've got the gift o' the gab." (1965 edn., 261); "My background was a barrier. It's working class. This area round here is non-educational. We didn't have any books in our house. Once my dad said to me (while the speaker was writing an essay for homework) 'Why don't you do some real work?'" An Investigation of the learning needs of adults in Islington, 1983, Brenda Neale, ILEA/LONDON Borough of Islington, Library Service, 8.



- 243 In Collected Essays Vol 2 Hogarth Press, 1966, 116.  
First published in 'Moment' and other Essays Hogarth Press,  
1947 (Editorial note by Leonard Woolf).
- Compare Andre Gide: "Tant que l'on est occupé a vivre, on  
ne trouve jamais le temps d'ecrire" (Journal); Julien Benda:  
'Un main calleuse ne pourra jamais écrire" (O R T F, 10  
decembre, 1949). Both quoted in Michel Ragon, 1974 Histoire de la  
Litterature Proletarienne Paris: Albin Michel, 10.
- 244 In Folios of New Writing, Spring 1941, The Hogarth Press, 31-32.
- 245 Those Clouded Hills, 53, 63. Compare Heslop's references in Last  
Cage Down to Dimitroff (61), Trotsky (81) and Mossolov, Proko-  
fiev and Shostakovich (228)
- 246 Folios of New Writing, 33-34
- 247 Ibid, 32-33
- 248 Ibid, 34-35
- 249 Cp Henry James's characterization of Victorian novels as "loose,  
baggy monsters".
- 250 "A majestic policeman, thick-booted and caped, paraded down the  
main road as far as the last public house, observed that the  
streets and houses were all in their proper position...It became  
moist and warm, the streets and grey roofs steamed, whilst from  
inside the houses came a sound like the buzzing of angry, im-  
prisoned bees...Some of the men disdain the attraction of tea,  
claiming that their hobby is beer...The band has accepted one of  
several invitations to tea..." (Miners Day, 110-114)
- 251 Neath Guardian, 27 September, 1963
- 252 6 April, 1962
- 253 11 May, 8 June, 1962.
- 254 "The ancient pastime of 'fetching a bagfull' (gleaning coal from  
the tips) is the full swing around here." cp Lewis Jones's use  
of this in We Live, 41-46; Also Hello, Are you Working? Newcastle:  
Strong Words, and much documentary film footage of the 1930s.
- 255 13 December, 1940
- 256 Margaret Donaldson 1978 Children's Minds, Chs. 6, 7
- 257 10 January, 7 February 1941, for example.
- 258 Alexander Pope
- 259 William Shakespeare The Tempest, V.i.311
- 260 "I have been intrigued when attending other types of committees  
to compare the slackness and indecision with the keen forth-  
rightness and energy displayed at the miners' committees."
- 261 Those Clouded Hills, 33

- 262 E.g. in Pit Production Committees, see Those Clouded Hills, 34ff. This is an important strand of writing by and about working-class people. Cp the asymmetries and embarrassments of such dealings in Lewis Jones We Live 47ff; as between Sir Bracey Higgett and his overmen in Roger Dattler Uncouth Swain, Dent, 1933; Thomas Hardy 1872 Under the Greenwood Tree MacMillan, Part II, Ch 4; Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 1953, Cloud Howe; in A Scots Quair Pan 1982, 109-113, 184-185 George Eliot 1859, Adam Bede, Blackwood: NB the bizarre exchanges between Adam and Squire Arthur Donnithorne - eg Chs XXVII, XXVIII.
- 263 M A K Halliday, 1975
- 264 'Below the Tower', Folios of New Writing, 1941, The Hogarth Press, 35-36.

Five: A 'Second Moment' of Working-class Writing: Overview

- 1 T J Parry Jones, 1925, The Other Story of Coal: A working miner's Attempt to state the miner's point of view on the coal question London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd pp 1, 2, 10. I am grateful to John Field for drawing this to my attention.
- 2 "...almost anything would be published". Andy Croft. WEA conference '1930s Working-class Writers', Barlaston, Staffordshire, July, 1983.
- 3 Compare Jerry Dawson's comment (personal letter, 8.1.84) on an attempt (coincidentally involving Herbert Hodge) to set up a Theatre Association on Merseyside after World War II: "...it fizzled out as so many of the hopeful post-war undertakings did." Compare also the experience of Arena magazine. Working-class writers tended to disappear from such publications as New Writing in the latter part of W W II and certainly after it; contributors lists begin to read again like roll-calls of the literary establishment. The project of analysing the roots and nature of the 'second moment', and especially of exploring its multi-media 'documentarism' of working-class life (enacted by both 'insiders' and 'outsiders'), has been valuably advanced by Gustav Klaus (1985, 106, 128-175).
- 4 Dockers and Detectives 1983, 77.
- 5 Herbert Hodge 'The difficulties of the uneducated writer' in Life and Letters Today. October, 1939, 34-40.
- 6 B L Coombes, 'Below the Tower', Folios of New Writing, 1941, The Hogarth Press, 35-36.
- 7 It is of interest to reflect that during the period of these writers' compulsory schooling 'literature' had negligible representation in the elementary school curriculum, as compared with the '5 Rs' (reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, right and 'rong).  
John Field reports that Roger Dataller found in his experience the three areas of study most in demand among WEA students were economics; politics/constitution/civics; and social literature (Dickens, Gaskell, for example). (My emphasis)  
Reported at Barlaston WEA conference, July, 1983.
- 8 Roger Dataller, 1925, 92.
- 9 Willy Goldman, 'A Saint in the Making' - quoted in Ken Worpole (1983) Dockers and Detectives, 109. Compare Chris Richards's discussion ('Classroom Readings', Screen Education, 40, Autumn/Winter 1981/2, 67-79) of 'Brixton Alley': "writing is, particularly when it lacks a functional relevance to a practical task, defined in opposition to the accomplishment of masculinity; it is, as Paul Willis has shown, a practice for wankers and creeps."
- 10 Presentation de la collection des "Romans du Nouvel Age" Paris: Valios cited in Michel Ragon, 1974, Histoire de la Littérature Proletarienne Paris: Albin Michel, 163.
- 11 Op cit.
- 12 Op cit, 169.
- 13 Op Cit, 171

- 14 Op cit, 238.
- 15 Op cit, Ch VII, esp 237ff.
- 16 Op cit, 240.
- 17 Op cit, 240; John Lehmann, 1940 New Writing in Europe Harmondsworth: Penguin, 231.
- 18 I am indebted to Andy Croft for knowledge of this.
- 19 Ragon, 166.
- 20 Op cit, Ch IV.
- 21 For a more recent example see Carole Snee, 1979, 'Working Class Literature or Proletarian Writing?' in (ed) J Clark , et al. Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties.
- 22 Ragon, 170.
- 23 Ragon, 170, 240.

Six: Community Publishing: contexts, processes and aims

- 1 I have suggested elsewhere (G T Gregory 1979, 5-6, 1980, 1984a, 1984b) that Chris Searle's publication of East End school-children's poetry and the resultant furore seems to have been seminal. Four out of the ten groups whose work is represented in Writing (1978) - the first F W W C P anthology - invoke Searle's initiative as inspirational. Only one current project, Voices, claims direct continuity with developments prior to 1971. Voices grew out of earlier initiatives in trades union and Labour Party contexts in Manchester. These sought, like Arnold Wesker's Centre 42, to implement TUC Resolution 42, 1960, which recognized "the importance of the arts in the life of the community and looked for greater participation by the trade union movement in all cultural activities." See Voices 16, 56-60. Also David Evans's brief comment on this in 'Writers' Workshops and Working-Class Culture' in Jane L Thompson, (ed), Adult Education for a Change Hutchinson, 1980, 146, n 5. Voices became the responsibility of FWWCP in 1980. (The publication, also in 1971, of M Young, (ed) Knowledge and Control was a landmark in discourse about education - including some of the issues discussed below.)
- 2 D Morley & K Worpole, 'Writers at Work', The New Statesman, 30 April, 1982.
- 3 Examples include: People's Autobiography of Hackney; Tottenham Writers' Workshop; People's History of Yorkshire: history groups at Heptonstall and Todmorden, Yorkshire; Bristol Broad-sides; a sociology group at Billericay (WEA).
- 4 Examples include: groups within Centerprise (Hackney); Gatehouse (Manchester); Bradford Literacy Group; Pecknam Publishing Project; Write First Time (Bedford).
- 5 Centerprise (Hackney), The Bookplace (Peckham) and Tower Hamlets Arts Project are examples.
- 6 Writing, FWWCP, 1978, 150-157.
- 7 Interview, QueenSpark, 22 January, 1985.
- 8 David Evans, op cit, 143.
- 9 "Now with the motorways, dual carriage-ways, demolishing of good houses, building of housing estates, etc, shops gone, roads impassable except underground at risk of mugging, how one wishes we could return to the peace, tranquillity and happiness of the bygone era." East Bowling History Workshop 1980 East Bowling Reflections See G T Gregory 1981 46-47.
- 10 For example, FWWCP groups and individuals contribute to annual History Workshops; some individuals are prominent in both organisations.
- 11 "It is significant that in the index to the first six volumes of the (History Workshop) Journal, which appeared in No 7, under the headings 'Local History', 'Report Back', 'Work in Progress', or 'Workers' Education', there is no reference to any of the act-

ivities or achievements of the local history projects associated with the FWWCP." K Worpole, 'A Ghostly Pavement', New Statesman, 22 February, 1980, 289.

- 12 R Samuel 'Truth is Partisan', New Statesman, 15 February, 1930, 247.
- 13 Ibidem, 248.
- 14 Ibidem, 249.
- 15 History Workshop Bulletin 1, 1
- 16 Ibidem, 2.
- 17 K Worpole, 'A Ghostly Pavement', New Statesman, 22 February, 1980, 288.
- 18 Quoted in P Thompson, 1978, 61.
- 19 See P Thompson, 1980 (mentioned below); also an especially fascinating discussion by D Bertaux and I Bertaux-Wiame, in D Bertaux, 1981.
- 20 This enterprise reaches its apotheosis, perhaps, in the work of the American 'cliometricians', of whom Norman Stone has written: "They are historians who build paradigmatic models, sometimes counter-factual ones about worlds which never existed in real life, and who test the validity of the models by the most sophisticated mathematical and algebraical formulae applied to very large quantities of electronically processed data...These great enterprises are necessarily the result of team-work, rather like the building of the pyramids: squads of diligent assistants assemble data, encode it, programme it, and pass it through the maw of the computer, all under the autocratic direction of a team-leader. The results cannot be tested by any of the traditional methods since the evidence is buried in private computer-tapes, not exposed in public foot-notes. In any case the data are often expressed in so mathematically recondite a form that they are unintelligible to the majority of the historical profession. The only reassurance to the bemused laity is that the members of this priestly order disagree fiercely and publicly about the validity of each other's findings." 'The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History', Past and Present, Vol 85, November 1979, 3-24, 6.
- 21 P Thompson, in D Bertaux (ed) 1981, 290.
- 22 P Thompson, 1978, 52ff.
- 23 D Lance, 'Oral History Archives: Perceptions and Practices' in Oral History, Vol 8, No 2, Autumn 1980, 59.
- 24 R Grele, 'Listen to Their Voices' in Oral History, Vol 7, No 1, Spring, 1979, 33-41.
- 25 P Thompson, 1978, eg 53; D Bertaux (ed) 1981, eg 30.
- 26 For example, 1978 The Voice of the Past; 'The New Oral History in France', Oral History, Vol 8, No 1, 14-20; 'Britain Strikes Back: Two Hundred Years of "Oral History"?' Oral History, Vol 9 No 1, Spring, 1981, 3-4; 'Life Histories and the Analysis of Social Change' in D Bertaux (ed) 1981, Biography and Society, 289-306.

- 27 P Thompson, 1978, 63.
- 28 P Thompson, 1978, Ch 3.
- 29 Exceptions, where documentary material is also used, include The Island, Centerprise, 1979; Bristol's Other History, Bristol Broadsides, 1983; Edwardian Cornholme Cornholme Write Your Own History (WEA) 1981: "We combined oral evidence with the use of some interesting documentary sources" (4).
- 30 Some mss offered to community publishers have gathered considerable 'dust' since writing: eg Harry Harris's Under Oars 1930s (Centerprise, 1978); Stan Rothwell's Lambeth at War late 1940s (SEI People's History, 1979); Walter Southgate's That's the Way it Was 1950 (New Clarion/History Workshop Centre for London History, 1982). Maggie Hewitt (Centerprise) told me (April, 1984): We get lots of individuals coming in with poems etc to publish. We usually have to say 'We can't publish them but if you'd like to produce a duplicated booklet we'll help you do it. We'll try to sell a hundred; you take a hundred too.' A recent development has been groups coming in with whole books to publish. Recently there was a black theatre group with a playscript.
- 31 eg H Davies, 1983 The Lean Years Middlesborough: Andy Croft; P Cadle Afterthoughts Quiet Publications (sold door to door by poet/publisher). For reference to self-publication in the first 'moment' see J Burnett, D Vincent, & D Mayall, 1984 The Autobiography of the Working-Class: An Annotated Critical Bibliography Vol 1 1790-1900 Brighton: Harvester, xx. Of John Taylor, the seventeenth century "Water Poet", Southey writes (28): "The manner in which he published his books... was to print them at his own cost, makes presents of them, and then hope for "sweet remuneration" from the persons whom he had thus delighted to honour."
- 32 N Griffiths, (ed) Shops Book 1979; Brighton on the Rocks: Monetarium and the Local State (1984): a formidable and widely-reviewed achievement. Among the work of individual authors (as opposed to collectivities as here) only a handful of texts - such as Tony Parker's The People of Providence, 1983 and Jeremy Seabrook's What Went Wrong?, 1978 (first recommended to me in 1980 by a member of QueenSpark) - bear comparison.
- 33 QueenSpark Development Programme 1984-1987, October, 1984, Section 13.
- 34 "In 1893 miners resisted a 25% wage cut. At Featherstone, two people were killed and thirteen injured when soldiers fired on an unarmed crowd. A Featherstone coroner's jury blamed the colliery manager for the deaths but a government commission found that the killings were justified." The Featherstone Disturbance, 1980, A People's History of Yorkshire.
- 35 Interview, January, 1982.
- 36 On Earth to Make the Numbers Up, 1981
- 37 This has happened all over the country - within the experience of community-publishing ventures as well as, for example, within the projects of Professor John Burnett (Burnett, 1974, 1982).
- 38 Interview, February, 1985.

- 39 Interview, February, 1985.
- 40 See Huw Beynon & Colin Hutchinson (eds), Jack Common's Revolt against an 'Age of Plenty', 1980.
- 41 George Garrett, 1982, Out of Liverpool
- 42 Ken Worpole 1983 Dockers and Detectives Note also WEA conferences at Queens Square, W C 1 and Wedgwood Memorial College, Barlaston, Staffs, 1983, 1984; contributions at History Workshop, 1983.
- 43 QueenSpark (campaign newspaper) No 24, Autumn, 1979, 2.
- 44 The Co-operator, No 6, 1 October, 1828, quoted in H Silver, 1965. The Concept of Popular Education: a study of ideas and social movements, 165.
- 45 For example, Dolly Davey, 1981, A Sense of Adventure, Introduction.
- 46 Community-publications typically include statements of group aims.
- 47 19 from 8 Liverpool 8 Writers' Workshop, Liverpool, 1
- 48 Toby, 1979, end cover.
- 49 For example, Strong Words (Whitley Bay) 1977 Hello, Are You Working, 94: "The main aim...is to give working people the opportunity to publish and communicate their own feelings and ideas."
- 50 Coming Up, 1977, 112.
- 51 Write On, No 1, undated, Introduction.
- 52 Taffy Lewis, 1979 Any Road Small Heath, Introduction, 1.
- 53 Let Loose 1978 Bedford, 4,5.
- 54 Write On, undated, No 4, Introduction: "I'm not going to use (as yardstick) the 'you've got to use my values if you want to fit into my dialectical perspective' of the People's Vanguard."
- 55 For example, J M Batchelor, 1979, On the Wild Side, 63
- 56 Write On, No 1, undated, 1
- 57 Leslie Wilson, 1980 Dobroyed. This is discussed below, Ch. 9, Note 11.
- 58 Ranjit Sumal, 1981, 1.
- 59 ed R Davis, undated, A Derbyshire Town Remembered, end cover
- 60 See, for example, K Worpole: "... we're publishing autobiographies for their ability to stand for, to represent the common life", in G T Gregory, 1979, 173.
- 61 The 'Readers' Letters' section of QueenSpark (community newspaper), and the origins of published books - one sparked off by another (Yorkshire Arts Circus and QueenSpark, for example) - provide instances.



- 62 For example J Bellamy, et al. Who Was Harry Cowley? QueenSpark 1985; Harry Davies, 1983 The Lean Years.
- 63 19 from 8, undated, 1
- 64 Leaflet, undated: Yorkshire Arts Circus: What's it all about?
- 65 For example, In the Making No 5, 1978
- 66 Bristol BroadSides, 1983, Bristol's Other History, 4
- 67 eg Our Scattered Lives, undated, WEA Sociology Class, Billericay, Essex; Mid-Victorian Cornholme, 1980, Edwardian Cornholme, 1981, Gold Under the Hammer: Passive Resistance in Cornholme 1902-1914, 1982 - Cornholme (West Yorkshire) 'Write Your Own History' WEA class; Heptonstall Township in the Eighteenth Century 1981 Hebden Bridge WEA branch, West Yorkshire.
- 68 Yuri Kochiyama, 1981 Fishmerchant's Daughter New York Community Documentation Workshop, cover.
- 69 See FWWCP 1978 Writing, 136: "In this sort of setting the need to collect and publish the memories of the area's elderly residents seems more urgent and necessary than it does in other more stable areas, for within a few years the majority of Milton Keynes population will be strangers to the area, and probably inquisitive as to what went on before they came."
- 70 1970 Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Oriel Press, 3.
- 71 1983 Neil Richardson, cover. See also Strong Words op cit, 6.
- 72 Yuri Kochiyama, 1981, cover.
- 73 Hello, Are you Working?, 94
- 74 FWWCP 1978 Writing, 169
- 75 Undated, As Things Are: Women, Work and Family in South London, 53
- 76 M Le Sueur, 1977 Song for My Time: Stories of the Period of Repression, 72.
- 77 B Healey, 1980 Hard Times and Easy Terms, 163
- 78 See Minority Press Group 1980 Here is the Other News, 6
- 79 For example, Peckham Publishing Project 1982 How to Make a Book Peckham Publishing Project; 'Write Your Own Way': a day event at Gillingham (Kent) Adult Education Centre, 8 December, 1984. Presentations and 'workshops' included: 'Getting Started. Have you ever wanted to write but don't know how to start?'; 'An opportunity to share your writing with others and gain support and ideas from people in the group'; 'Writing life stories - "everyone has a book in them"'; 'How to set up a community newspaper'; 'How to make a book'; 'How to set up a writers' workshop'.
- 80 At the 21st Annual Course & Conferences of the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE), Durham, April, 1984, Commission Six was entitled 'Computers and Literacy'.

- 81 "It is obvious that there has been a close relation, from the beginning, between the new forces and the new relations of production. But it is a very weak kind of thinking to abstract the technical and technological changes and to explain the widespread social, economic and cultural changes as determined by them. This error, now identified as 'technological determinism', bears with particular weight on interpretation of all the later stages of industrialization. It is especially misleading in descriptions and predictions of a 'post-industrial 'society.'" Raymond Williams 1983 Towards 2000, 84, NB Chris Searle's earliest publications were on letterpress...
- 82 D Morley, & K Worpole, (eds) 1982 The Republic of Letters Comedia/Minority Press Group Series, no 6, 3. See also David Edgar (Guardian, 7 July, 1986, 21: 'It wasn't so naff in the 60s after all') Analogous divergent trends are observable in the field of education. 'Bureaucratic' models of educational accountability are overriding more democratic, multidirectional approaches; in the fields of educational research realisation of the need for teachers collaboratively to define their own problems (eg Lawrence Stenhouse's 'Teacher as Researcher' notion: Stenhouse, 1975) are currently overwhelmed by insistence on centralist definitions. The case for genuinely 'popular' planning and provision is urged by Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA), founded 1973. See, for example, SERA, Local Socialism, issues 17 (April/May 1983) and 18 (June/July 1983), 9 Poland Street, London, W 1.
- 83 A H Halsey, 1979 'Accountability of government and public services' (paper given to SSRC seminar on Aspects of Accountability, 11 September, 1979) quoted in D J Nuttall et al (1982) Accountability and Evaluation Open University, Milton Keynes. Consider also the growth of alternative/oppositional schooling - and the excitement generated by de-schoolers - in the period in question.
- 84 R Miliband, 'A State of De-subordination' British Journal of Sociology Vol XXIX, No 4 (1978), 399-409. See also Stedman Jones, 1984, 33.
- 85 See, for example, the series of articles 'Debating the Future of Socialism' in New Statesman, especially 19 August, 1983 (Peter Hain), 26 August 1983 (Lynne Segal). See also Peter Hain, The Democratic Alternative, 1983
- 86 See Tony Gibson, People Power: Community and Work Groups in Action, 1979. Cp Community by Action (magazine) P O Box 665, London SW1X 8DX. Note such other analogous developments as 'Open Learning'.
- 87 The Times Educational Supplement, 13 August, 1982.
- 88 In a discussion with me (January, 1985) members of QueenSpark agreed there is a connection between the project and Sussex University to the extent that many QueenSpark workers have have connections with the university. Several places show continuity of working-class cultural activity: eg Hebden Bridge/Todmorden (Yorkshire) - see S Rowbotham, 1981, 63; compare contemporary developments at Cornholme and Hebden Bridge.

Seven: The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers:  
Processes and Debates

- 1 D Morley, & K Worpole, (eds) 1982 The Republic of Letters Comedia, 2
- 2 D Evans, 1980, 'Writers' Workshops and Working-class culture' in J L Thompson, (ed) Adult Education for a Change, 141-142.
- 3 For example Centerprise, Hackney, has survived more than one arson attack; Bookmarx, Birmingham, was similarly attacked in 1981. See D Berry, New Statesman 5 July, 1985, 14, for discussion of the crisis in the affairs of radical bookshops.
- 4 Eg C Searle, in G T Gregory, 1979, 234: "...they shouldn't be relying on the Arts Council...The Arts Council are ~~there~~ basically to promote bourgeois art and elitist forms of art." FWWCP Executive Minutes, 10 January, 1981: "It was generally agreed that we have been spending far too much time on the ACGB." An FWWCP Report (28 October, 1980) on a weekend workshop mentioned the (classic) problem of the gap always left when funding for a paid worker runs out (analogous ~~with the problem~~ in education of sustaining a curriculum innovation once the prime mover leaves. The story was told of a group whose paid worker (a teacher) moved on: "The group chose one of themselves, a bus driver, to take the job over; but the adult education body refused to fund him as they felt he was not suitably qualified for the work. After 6 months of him doing it unpaid, and when they learnt he had something published, they changed their minds and funded him."
- 5 See D Morley, & K Worpole, (eds) 1982, 132.
- 6 Loc cit.
- 7 Op Cit, 135,
- 8 O Kelly, 1984 Community, Art and the State: Storming the Citadels. Comedia, 24.
- 9 Op cit, 17-18.
- 10 D Morley & K Worpole (eds) 1982, 139. See Ch 10 below for discussion of educational aspects of working-class writing and community publishing.
- 11 FWWCP Executive Minutes 10 January, 1981: "ACGB offered to fund (£5,500) a Literature Development Officer (but not a National Coordinator): They want the post advertised nationally. They want person appointed to have a knowledge of the 'literary traditions of the past..."
- 12 See The 'Nostalgia' Issue' below; also 'Separatist Groups: The Great Debate', Scotland Road '83, in Voices No 30, Winter 1983/1984, 24-25.
- 13 'Popular memory: theory, politics, method' in R Johnson, et al (eds) 1982 Making Histories: Studies in history-writing and politics Hutchinson, 251.

- 14 See, for example, his 'Writers' Workshops and Working-Class Culture' in J L Thompson, (ed) 1980 Adult Education for a Change, Hutchinson.
- 15 In G T Gregory, 1979, 166.
- 16 For example: A Newton, 1974 Years of Change Centerprise; J Tracey, 1975 Canary Men and Cobblers Strong Words; Hello, Are You Working? 1977 Strong Words: W Whitfield (ed) 1980 Clout Commonword; J.Crump 1980 The Ups and Downs of Being Born Vassall Neighbourhood Council.
- 17 An especially clear example is Bert Healey, 1980 Hard Times and Easy Terms QueenSpark - eg pp 15, 16, 20, 27-28, 55-56, 72-73, 84, 118, 121, 136.
- 18 'Community Publishing: Political Dilemmas' in Head and Hand, No 6, Winter 1980, 14-15.
- 19 Bowling Tidings 1979; East Bowling Reflections 1980; East Bowling Schools 1981; Do You Remember? Further Reflections 1983.
- 20 K Worpole, 1977 Local Publishing and Local Culture, 11.
- 21 "Good God, if my parents were alive they'd have loved to have seen that." QueenSpark (community newspaper) No 27, Autumn 1980, 2
- 22 "I come from Lancashire and yet I could have been reading about memories from my own childhood. The only exception was that in the North we would have included the 'Knocker-Up'..." QueenSpark, No 21 Summer 1978, 3 (Mrs May Alder).
- 23 Successive publications of Centerprise, QueenSpark (especially) and Yorkshire Arts Circus provide clear examples.
- 24 Olive Rogers, January 1983, FWWCP report.
- 25 D Morley, & K Worpole, (eds) 1982 The Republic of Letters, Comedia/Minority Press Group, Series No 6 94-95.
- 26 Chris Miller, Loc cit.
- 27 Lee Centre 1981 Something to Say, 17. Sometimes there has been recourse to Kelly's Directory to settle group memory differences (WEA Conference, 8 March, 1980).
- 28 In 'What is Class Consciousness?' cited in C Miller, loc, cit.
- 29 See, for example, AGM Agendas and 'workshop' themes, 1980-1984.
- 30 R Fletcher, 1984, Education in Society Penguin.
- 31 Les Moss's Live and Learn.
- 32 Stephen Yeo goes on: "... Street or Area Unions might be able to: Help individuals' situations and do some of the work, for ourselves and in association, which CABs, social workers, doctors and others try to do for us, in isolated and not always effective ways. Resist attacks

through government cuts on things which we value, nursery education, health services, economical housing to rent, the Schools Library Service, a clean town, flat paving stones and so on. Bargain and establish Citizen's Control over how much, and in what forms, and what happens to the revenue we supply to the local and national State. We pay PAYE income tax, Rates, Insurance Contributions and much else besides. With that money They govern us and arrange our lives. Why not find ways of paying these taxes (or not paying them) together, through the Area Union, and insisting on direct control over what is done with our money? Like investors, and like ourselves at work, we have the power to strike: that power could be exercised, if it was so decided by democratic area association, over matters like rates, rent and taxes, in order to build the kind of places we want to live in. Plan and Produce. Instead of reacting to, and 'approving', objecting to, 'participating in' plans...made by others... our own Unions could make our own plans..." Chris Miller (loc. cit) is sceptical: "...unlike trade unions, communities do not necessarily share a common material base, are often divided along class lines and have no easily identifiable and single oppressor..."

- 33 QueenSpark, 1983, 174 Compare the philosophy of the remarkable Easterhouse (Glasgow) Festival Society (community project): that the deprivation and despair of the residents of a massive housing project built virtually without amenities could be defeated only from within: "Every positive act taken by the community is an expression of our determination to change things...Working class people have to work out their own salvation - no one can do it for us." Easterhouse Festival Society 1982 Five Years On, 3, 16.
- 34 New Statesman 11 January 1985, 39. Compare Another Standard: Community, Art, Culture and Politics. Autumn 1983, editorial: "...we learn...by drawing lessons from each experience, by building upon the conclusions we draw from these lessons; by, in the end, constructing theory...as a movement we will produce our own theory, and...we will relate it back to our practice."
- 35 Keywords (rev ed, 1983) Fontana, 75.
- 36 Ibidem, 76.
- 37 In O Kelly, 1984 Community Art and the State Comedia, Ch 7. The distinction must be stressed. FWWCP has consistently rejected the 'community arts' label, distinguishing the latter as applying to professional and sometimes seriously flawed projects: "At worst, some community arts are unreconstructed entertainment, pure clowning with very little skill sharing...The ~~community arts~~ movement has been financially marginalised by the creation of a Community Arts Panel (a cultural bargain basement) by the Arts Council". D Morley & K Worpole (eds) The Republic of Letters, 56. (For a subtle analysis of the shaping importance of funding policy - that of both supplicants and distributors - see Kelly, Ch 1. Note FWWCP rejection of ACGB's offer to consider funding under 'community arts' in 1979). In spite of the distinctions suggested above, Kelly's analysis has relevance to the present discussion and his introduction implies specifically a wide measure of agreement with Ken Worpole, who had read and commented on Owen Kelly's manuscript.
- 38 New Statesman, 8 March, 1985, 23
- 39 Culture and Society: 1780-1950, quoted in Kelly, 50

- 40 See, for example, R Johnson, et al (eds) 1982, 205-254.
- 41 Oral History, Vol. 1, No 3, 46, cited in P Thompson, 1978, 62.
- 42 FWWCP Report 1981-1982, 4
- 43 Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', History Workshop Journal, 12, Autumn 1981, 99-100.
- 44 'Worms of the Earth', New Statesman, 21 March, 1980, 435
- 45 A Portelli, op cit, 96.
- 46 D Bertaux, (1981, 10) derives the term from N K Denzin (ed) 1970 Sociological Methods Chicago: Aldine, 449-458, 469-522. Note the later use of this term by the Ford Teaching Project: where the perspectives on lessons of teacher, 'expert observer' and pupils are 'triangulated' to establish an enriched account; see, for example, L Stenhouse, (ed) 1980 Curriculum Research and Development in Action Heinemann, 237-238.
- 47 D Bertaux, 1981, 10.
- 48 P Thompson, in D Berteaux, 1981, 292.
- 49 R Hay, 'Use and Abuse of Oral Evidence', unpublished paper, 5, cited in P Thompson, 1978, 107.
- 50 R Grele, 'Listen to their Voices', Oral History, Vol 7, No 1, Spring, 1979, 33-42.
- 51 J Goody, & I Watt, 1968 'The Consequences of Literacy' in P P Giglioli (ed) Language and Social Context Penguin 311-357. This paper (1) sketches "the characteristics of cultural transmission in illiterate societies, where lack of distinction between myth and history due to the absence of written records fosters a 'homeostatic tendency,' which disregards or modifies those aspects of the past which are no longer functional for the present"; (2) discusses "how the invention of writing breaks down this cultural equilibrium"; and (3) "outlines the cultural features of modern societies and relates them to the impact of diffused literacy". (Giglioli, 1972, 309).
- 52 P Thompson, 1978, 129.
- 53 T Lummis, 'The occupational community of East Anglian fishermen: an historical dimension through oral evidence', British Journal of Sociology, Vol 28, No 1, March 1977, 52.
- 54 "There is a great fashion, at the moment, for listening reverently to anyone (particularly the Oldest Resident) talking into a tape recorder. There was a parallel excitement seventy or eighty years ago, supported by Rudyard Kipling of all people, for "original printed sources"; which too often meant that a quotation from a long dead provincial newspaper was treated with a reverence which would certainly not have been accorded to a contemporary number of the Daily Mail." Dame Margaret Cole, Oral History, Vol 6, No 1, Spring, 1978, 43.
- 55 J Saville, in P Thompson, 1978, 91.
- 56 P Thompson, 1978, 97.
- 57 "The transcript turns aural objects into visual ones, which inevitably implies reduction and manipulation." Portelli. 1981, 97.

- 58 "...as seems to be the case with the Columbia University Oral History Program, in New York..."A Portelli, 1981, 97.
- 59 J White, 'Beyond Autobiography' New Statesman, 29 February, 1980, 325-327.
- 60 The CCCS 'Popular Memory' Group see the dangers. Observing that "the implications for method follow from the recognition that social location is no guarantee of politically useful knowledge" they continue:"...the method needs to maximise opportunities for second thoughts, for further analysis of primary results and first impressions, for retheorizing and 'making strange' familiar appearances. Some of us rebel against this, because the ugly figure of the 'historian' (or 'sociologist') once more intrudes, telling us what our explanations should be, fitting our 'facts' to his theories, presenting our experience back to us, sometimes in unrecognizable forms. But secondary analysis need not take this form, or be constrained within the existing social divisions of intellectual labour. It could be a more internal process: a working up of first accounts by authors themselves, in the light of further research and thinking. Again we need to detach the general question (the necessity of study for overcoming ideological ways of thinking) from the particular social and educational forms in which this problem currently appears. Our point is that it is not enough that the production of first accounts be respected in the sense of being left untouched. Really to 'respect' them is to take them as the basis for larger understandings, for the progressive deepening of knowledge and for active political involvement." R Johnson et al (eds) 1982, 240. What is proposed here is roughly what people's history groups, such as QueenSpark, Brighton, in collective, democratic ways of working, have been trying to do for some years.
- 61 J White History Workshop Federation Bulletin No 1, September, 1980, 13.
- 62 M K Ashby, 1961 Joseph Ashby of Tysoe Cambridge University Press, 53, quoted in, K Worpole, 'A Ghostly Pavement', New Statesman, 22 February, 1980, 288.
- 63 Loc cit, 288, 289.
- 64 S Yeo, 1981 'The politics of community publications' in R Samuel, (ed) People's History and Socialist Theory 42-48.
- 65 Op, cit 46.
- 66 C S L Davies, 'Making Sense of Chaos', New Statesman, 13 March, 1981, 18.

Eight: Community-published writing: Content and Forms

- 1 Exceptions include some of the work of Word and Action (Dorset); of St Edmund's Arts Centre, Salisbury; of QueenSpark, Brighton; of Yorkshire Art Circus; of WEA, Billericay.
- 2 For example, The Times of Our Lives, Peckham Publishing Project, 1983, especially "Our 'Ouse" by James Fulljames (b 1910) 31-34.
- 3 Jack Laidlaw, 1985 'Public Baths' in Rachel Van Riel, (ed) 1985 Bathtime Yorkshire Arts Circus, 7.
- 4 Peckham People's History 1983 The Times of Our Lives, 57,66.
- 5 East Bowling History Workshop 1980 East Bowling Reflections, 17
- 6 Lal Youens in Lee Centre 1981 Something to Say, 13.
- 7 Daisy Noakes 1975/1980 The Town Beehive QueenSpark, 15.
- 8 Jim Smith in The Island Centerprise, 27-28.
- 9 Ron Barnes (1974, 1976) gives several examples. See also Julia Benson Young 1984 Getting Ideas Yorkshire Art Circus, 13.
- 10 Evelyn Haythorne 1981 On Earth to Make the Numbers Up Yorkshire Art Circus, 32-34.
- 11 Alice Cordelia Davis (b 1898) 'Being the eldest daughter' in Peckham People's History The Times of Our Lives, 58.
- 12 East Bowling Reflections, 14-15.
- 13 Doris M Bailey 1981 Children of the Green Stepney Books 69-70, for example.
- 14 "My brothers were down the pit and I remember my father (unemployed) bathing them in the bath in front of the fire. And you know these 'buttons' on your back, the small bones on your back where the skin had been knocked off the roof of the pit. My father used to bathe these buttons and put boracic powder on them." Dickie Beavis 1980 What Price Happiness? My Life from Coal Hower to Shop Steward Strong Words, 20.
- 15 Julia Benson Young 1984 Getting Ideas, 7
- 16 John Langley 1976 Always a Layman QueenSpark, 11.
- 17 A S Jasper 1974 A Hoxton Childhood contains more examples than most autobiographies of a phenomenon referred to by David Vincent as "short distance residential mobility" (1981, 25).
- 18 Eg Alf Slater in The Times of Our Lives, 41.
- 19 Alice Linton 1982 Not Expecting Miracles Centerprise, 53; The Island Centerprise, 33,45



- 20 "The girl (who won a rare City Council Scholarship from Usher Street Girls' School to Bradford Girls' Grammar School) was one of four children whose father had died some years before...The whole neighbourhood rallied round to help. Mrs Baldwin of the local fruit shop...provided a new navy blue gym tunic. Mabel Jones, the Draper, gave a supply of long-sleeved white blouses. Annie Scully, her mother's friend, bought the regulation leather purse with strap to be worn round the neck and across one shoulder." East Bowling Schools 1981, 68 Two of my interviewees (Evelyn Haythorne, Daisy Noakes) were less fortunate in this respect and unable to take up their scholarships.
- 21 eg. James Fulljames (b 1910) in The Times of Our Lives Peckham Publishing Project, 33-34.
- 22 Colin Ward 1978 The Child in the City.
- 23 eg Barbara Caldecourt 1981 Home to Hartlepool A People's History of the North, 38.
- 24 In Evelyn Haythorne's On Earth to Make the Numbers Up this becomes a prominent motif of the narrative.
- 25 eg 'When Two Woodbines were  $\frac{1}{2}$ d' in Edwardian Cornholme Write Your Own History, WEA, 1981, 11.
- 26 "When the war ended, on V E Day we all celebrated and had a party in the street. With the few flags available we hung everything we could put our hands on across the street, and there flew ladies bloomers men's longjohns and babies nappies. (There were no lacy panties in those days)." The Ups and Downs of Florrie Roberts, Peckham Publishing Project, 1980, 16.
- 27 Lee Centre, 1981, Something to Say, 5.
- 28 "I can't quite remember my schooldays...One thing I can remember, I got the cane across my hand because of playing in the cloakroom, and it wasn't me that was doing it." Recalled 73 years on by Alice in When I was Young, Marion Kovach, 15
- 29 Doris M Bailey 1981 Children of the Green, 15.
- 30 Dickie Beavis 1980 What Price Happiness?, 14.
- 31 Peckham People's History 1983 The Times of Our Lives, 117.
- 32 Ron Barnes has recalled examples of this, eg, 1976, 150.
- 33 The Times of Our Lives, Lilian Blore (b 1905), 115.
- 34 Bert Healey 1980 Hard Times and Easy Terms: and other tales by a Queens Park Cockney, QueenSpark, 25.
- 35 Lal Youens in Something to Say, 13.
- 36 The phrase is Derwent Coleridge's: cited in G Grace, 1978 Teachers, Ideology and Control. RKP, 2 H J Bennett 1980 I was a Walworth Boy Peckham Publishing Project, 33-36, provides an example.

- 37 "I left school at fourteen and a half. I was severely berated by my elementary school teacher when she met me in the street in spite of my efforts to avoid her. She called me over and gave me a terrific row for not entering an examination that would have taken me somewhere else." Bill Massey 1980 Shepherds Bush Memories Shepherd's Bush Local History Project, 1 (Here recalling childhood in Glasgow).  
Evelyn Haythorne passed her eleven plus "...but then the bombshell dropped..." I'm ~~sorry~~ love, but you can't go. There isn't any way that I can afford your uniform." On Earth to Make the Numbers Up, 23,25. A trawl of publications (eg Toby; Edwardian Cornholme) suggests as a pattern that younger children - once there were older siblings earning - fared better in this respect.
- 38 Pam Bailey 1983 Grampy Word & Action (Dorset), 22.
- 39 James Fulljames (b.1908) 'Oliver Goldsmith School, Camberwell in The Times of Our Lives Peckham, Publishing Project, 112. Fuller information as to the nature of Old Moore's drawing tasks is of course required for a proper assessment.
- 40 "My brother and I had an ink pad and we used to cut little stars out of the potato peelings. We'd fix them on a matchstick and print a star on the Sunday School card." John, When I was Young Marion Kovach, 7.
- 41 See B Simon, 1974 The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870; and 1965 Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920.
- 42 Bill Massey (1980) Shepherds Bush Memories, 2.
- 43 Mrs Pearce in Bristol's Other History Bristol BroadSides 1983, 39.
- 44 Jim Flowers, idem.
- 45 Ibidem, 42.
- 46 Jack Marshall : 1984 The King's Own Yorkshireman, Yorkshire Art Circus, 43.
- 47 eg Mr Yates in Evelyn Haythorne's On Events to Make the Numbers Up 27 ff; see also Annie Barnes (b 1898) Tough Annie Stepney Books 1980. As a councillor Annie wanted to investigate personally complaints that a particular officer was maltreating applicants for 'Relief': "I'd heard complaints about him from other people. Anyway, I thought I'd prove it for myself. I wanted to be absolutely sure of the facts. I dressed up in an old pair of shoes and a funny little hat and a veil. I wore an old coat with the collar turned up, and I went off to the Relief Office..."
- 48 "At one time, I hadn't been all the week, and (Mr Denman, welfare officer) happened to see Linda, one day, going to school....He called her back, 'Linda', he said, 'you had that dress on yesterday, and the day before.'  
'Yes I know, ' she said, 'my mum's sick. She hasn't done any washing.'  
He came up to see if I was alright..."  
Joyce Crump 1980 The Ups and Downs of Being Born Vassall Neighbourhood Council, 36.

- 49 'Sotheby Flag' by Betty Vodden in Hackney Women Writers 1984 Some Grit, Some Fire, 32.
- 50 Daisy Noakes 1980 Faded Rainbow: our married years QueenSpark, 53.
- 51 Loc cit, 34: Mr Elphick, remembered gratefully decades later.
- 52 A preliminary exploration of this topic is included in G T Gregory, 1979, 37-51.
- 53 "Mrs O remembers her first day in the mill quite clearly. 'I didn't want to go. I was frightened, and when I got home I said to my mother, 'Shall I be deaf forever?' The noisy clacketting of the looms could easily terrify a child." Edwardian Cornholme, 19.
- 54 "Everyone knew where skinyards were. It were a terrible hard job... We had miners come to us wouldn't stick it... It helped if you'd a long back. Pulling would change your shape, mind. I were six stone twelve when I started and it brought me out. When I went for me army medical in 1943 the sergeant couldn't believe me chest measurement against me waist, had to run tape round again to make sure". Zachariah Crashley 'Skinyards' in All in a Day's Work Yorkshire Art Circus, 1.
- 55 Eg. Arthur Newton 1974 Years of Change Centerprise, 18.
- 56 Eg. in Hello, Are you Working? Strong Words, 13, 24- 25.
- 57 "It takes a certain type of person to be able to cope with OPO (one-person-operated). You have to be determined to treat the job as two separate jobs (for 1/4 more wages). I've seen men go one-manning who have always been cheerful...and within 3 or 4 months they drive past you and they've got a perpetual frown on their face and they blow up at the slightest thing...If you watch a busman on holiday, it usually takes him 3 days to stop looking at his watch...There is still stress. The stress of potential accidents...there's always been a high heart disease among bus drivers, backache, stomachs. I'm told the life expectancy of a bus driver is lower than a miner." Busman, Brighton on the Rocks QueenSpark, Brighton, 26-27 (1984).
- 58 Eg. Working Lives I Centerprise 1976, 83.
- 59 See a farm worker's testimony in Seabrook, Jeremy 1978 What Went Wrong? 45 - not, of course, a community publication.
- 60 Eg Hodgkiss 1983 Two Lives Yorkshire Art Circus, 7-8.
- 61 Bert Healey 1980 Hard Times and Easy Terms, 106-107
- 62 Lew Lessen Working Lives II Centerprise 1977, 11
- 63 FWWCP 1978 Writing, 155
- 64 Eg. Working Lives I Centerprise, 31-50

- 65 eg Bill Jones in FWWCP Writing 1978, 169-172; see also 'Carrying a Man' in the glossary of dock slang appended to Tom Ash's Childhood Days: The Docks and Dock Slang (published by the author, undated), 52.
- 66 1985 saw the first separate FWWCP catalogue of 'Women Writers' - from Centerprise.
- 67 Eg. Ranjit Sumal contrasts village life in Punjab with what she found on arrival in London: "People passed by without a word...with their own partners minding their own business, no-one to talk to except our own family at home...everything...shuttered...surrounded by walls inside and outside." Back Home Commonplace, Ealing, 17.
- 68 "After I came here all joy and dream disappeared. I felt lost, really completely lost. At airport, looking all around me so many people and so much things happening - still today I can't explain that confusion. All the way from airport first by tube and then by bus to his Stoke Newington bed-sitter. Worse to come carrying heavy bags. I started to realise my husband is very mean though he impresses family back home with gifts." Parveen, Breaking the Silence: Writing by Asian Women Centerprise 1984, 10.
- 69 See, especially, Mita's contribution to Breaking the Silence - 'The Minimum of Contact' pp 56-72: she doesn't fit in here ("From then onwards I began slowly to withdraw contact from all aspects of this society. Even to this day, I try to maintain the minimum of contact."); yet the limitations and subservience to parents/husband that go with life in India are intolerable too.
- 70 Eg Bill Woodward 1980 You got to move on Media Resources Centre, School of Education & Humanities, N E London Polytechnic. See also Jeremy Sandford 1975 Gypsies Abacus - not, of course, a community publication.
- 71 Toby Bristol Broad sides, 1979, and Charlie Potter's On the Tramp in the 1930s 1983 Your own stuff press, Nottingham are examples.
- 72 Northern Gay Writers 1983 Commonword: Manchester is an example.
- 73 See, for example, Brighton on the Rocks: Monetarism and the Local State 1984. The effects of cuts sometimes emerge tellingly within pieces dealing with other matters. For example, in an earthy, humorous piece about her work bathing old ladies in Northgate Lodge, Pontefract, Joan Richards writes: "With the cuts at the moment we're not allowed to use shampoo either but the staff try and make a bit of money on tea and coffee to visitors and then we buy shampoo with that". Bathtime 1985 Yorkshire Art Circus, 18.
- 74 See, especially, Touch Annie Stepney Books, 1980.
- 75 William Muckle 1981 No Regrets People's Publications: Newcastle upon Tyne.
- 76 eg Julia Benson Young 1984 Getting Ideas Yorkshire Art Circus
- 77 eg Let Loose 1978 Write First Time.
- 78 Lee Centre 1981 Something to Say.

- 79 James Cummins 1981 The Landlord Cometh QueenSpark, Brighton, 13-15: "I began to think, and my mind began to reach out." (15)
- 80 eg Ron Barnes, 1976, Appendix, 206-208; Jim Wolveridge 1976 'Aint it Grand' (or 'This Was Stepney').
- 81 Toby Bristol Broadsides, for example.
- 82 William Muckle No Regrets, 51. See also P Camporesi, (ed) II Libro dei vagabondi Turin, 1973, 359 - quoted in P Burke, 'Languages and anti-languages in early modern Italy', History Workshop Journal 11. Spring 1982, 24-32.: "A roman beggar arrested in 1595 told the authorities that there would be a general meeting of beggars the following May 'to change their slang (mutare il gergo di parlare)' because outsiders had cracked their code."
- 83 Compare the pit glossary supplied by Tommy Wilson in the nineteenth century ((Klaus, 1985, 77) and Hodge and Coombes in 'Moment' II.
- 84 He don't know 'A' from a Bulls Foot (undated) Stepney Books; Robert Barltrop & Jim Wolveridge 1980 The Muvver Tongue The Journeyman Press - not of course a community publication.
- 85 Alice Linton 1982 Not Expecting Miracles Centerprise, 17-18, 26, 60.
- 86 Every Birth it Comes Different, 1979, Centerprise
- 87 Prison Voices (undated) Cardiff Prison; Adult Basic Education Centre Cardiff; Inside Out: Poems by Prisoners (undated) Leeds: Costello Moor; Wynter, 1980 On the other Side of the Fence Spitafields Books; Centerprise; J Nelson, 1978 No More Walls Union Place; J Baker, 1985, A Mis-spent Youth Centerprise
- 88 Leslie Wilson 1980 Dobroyed Commonword: Manchester
- 89 Bathnight 1985 Yorkshire Art Circus.
- 90 Les Moss 1979 Live and Learn QueenSpark; Pauline Wiltshire 1985 Living and Winning Centerprise,
- 91 Gold under the Hammer: Passive Resistance in Cornholme 1902-1914 Cornholme W E A 1982.
- 92 Where's Your Horns: People of Spitafields Talk About the Evacuation 1979 Spitafields Books.
- 93 Charles Poulsen 1976 Victoria Park Journeyman/Stepney Books
- 94 J E Connor 1980 All Stations to Poplar Tower Hamlets Arts Project.
- 95 Missile Village 1978 Strong Words.
- 96 The first of the "leading rules" of the London Corresponding Society. Memoir of Thomas Hardy...written by Himself 1832, 16.
- 97 in Different Drums: A Second Trade Union Annual ed Rick Gwilt 1984 Lancashire Association of Trades Councils, 9-21.
- 98 Eg Come and Get Me, 1979; Viva Whatsisname, 1979
- 99 On the Wild Side Commonword 1979.

- 100 Shoutin' and Bawlin' Tower Hamlets Arts Project, 1982
- 101 Eg Brighton on the Rocks 1984 QueenSpark
- 102 Eg Bristol as We Remember It Bristol BroadSides Lifetimes, 1975, I A S Manchester Polytechnic When I Was Young ed Marion Kovach Looking Back on Bristol: Hartoliffe People Remember Bristol BroadSides, undated.
- 103 Eg. John Langley 1976. Always a Layman QueenSpark.
- 104 Eg. Joe Bloomberg 1979 Looking Back: A Docker's Life Stepney Books, appendices.
- 105 Eg. Les Moss 1979 Live and Learn QueenSpark.
- 106 Eg Pauline Wiltshire 1985 Living and Winning Centerprise.
- 107 The Island 1979 Centerprise, 33.
- 108 Eg Cyril Arapoff's superb 'Hop Picking' in Alice Linton's Not Expecting Miracles 1982 Centerprise, 38.
- 109 Fred Eyre Kicked into Touch Senior Publications 1981 is an interesting case. An apprentice with Manchester City FC, Eyre failed to make it in the 'big time' and played first in the lower divisions, then for a succession of non-league clubs. What arguably 'legitimizes' his autobiography, packed with 'inside' football anecdotes, featuring both big names and the reality of the unglamorous end of football, is that while his football fortunes plummeted, he was becoming an entrepreneur stationery millionaire. The sense that success 'legitimizes' writing autobiography crops up in Burn, 39.
- 110 Roy Pascal 1960 Design and Truth in Autobiography RKP, 9.
- 111 Pascal, op cit, reserves the former term (autobiography) for some attempt at achievement of totality. (eg 12).
- 112 Interview in G T Gregory, 1979. What is actually representative is, of course, problematic.
- 113 Taffy Lewis 1979 Any Road: Pictures of Small Heath and Sparkbrook and further afield 1902-1939 Trinity Arts: Birmingham, 33.
- 114 Eg. in the practice of Brian Lewis (Yorkshire Art Circus) in respect of work by Evelyn Haythorne, Julia Benson Young and others; in that of Daisy Noakes acting as 'scribe' for her disabled husband).
- 115 See, for example, Joyce Crump 1980 The Ups and Downs of Being Born Vassall Neighbourhood Council, 1-2.
- 116 In 'Using community-published Writing in the classroom' in Jane Miller ed. 1984 Eccentric Propositions: Essays on Literature and the Curriculum RKP, 272-273.
- 117 Sparring for Luck 1982 Tower Hamlets Arts Project, the story of East End boxer-poet Stephen 'Johnny' Hicks is an example.

- 118 William Muckle No Regrets
- 119 ed Vic Gammon 1981 A small account of my travels through the wilderness by James Nye, QueenSpark.
- 120 eg Ron Barnes 1974 A Licence to Live Centerprise
- 121 Eg the opening pages of the autobiographies of Evelyn Haythorne, Doris Bailey, Alice Linton.
- 122 The Times of our Lives, 46.
- 123 Ibidem, 69.
- 124 Stan Rothwell 1981 Lambeth at War S E 1 People's History, 9 (written 1940).
- 125 Live and Learn 1979 QueenSpark.
- 126 By Pam Bailey 1983 Word and Action (Dorset).
- 127 QueenSpark, 1984.
- 128 For a preliminary discussion see G T Gregory, 1979, 72-91.
- 129 E Blunden, (ed) 1955 John Keats: Selected Poems Collins
- 130 Interview, 1980. Joe Smythe added: "Theories all seem to depend on a kind of exclusiveness - of the word. And that is something I don't feel." (my emphasis)
- 131 London Review of Books Vol 4 No 6. 1-14 April, 1982, 10.
- 132 Other contenders are briefly considered and rejected: D H Lawrence (poetry not characteristically boasting a working-class background); Stephen Spender (promising content - "cogs, driving-belts and the beauty of labour" - but, fatally, haut bourgeois); Douglas Dunn ("impeccably proletarian and Left-inclining" but, alas, Scottish).
- 133 See, for example, Voices No 22 Autumn 1980, 1,36.
- 134 See, for example Les Barker's 'Where do you go to my Doris?' Voices Autumn 1977, 47, and 'John Z de Lorean' in ed Rick Gwilt 1983 Nineteen Eighty Three: A First Trade Union Annual, 26.
- 135 For example the chilling version of 'The Laughing Policeman' by an un-named miner in Ken Loach's documentary about the Miner's Strike, 1984-1985, shown on Channel 4, March, 1985.
- 136 See D Morley and K Worpole, 'Writers at Work' New Statesman, 30 April, 1982, 19; and Brian Murphy, 1980 A Hundred Years of the Locoman's Trade Union (28-29 'The Footplate Poets') ASLEF: "For some curious reasons there has always been a strong connection between driving locomotives and writing poetry...Poetry written by drivers appears in the very first issue of the Locomotive Journal

and they have not stopped since. They write of the hardships and dangers of their work, they write of the long hours, the noise and the smoke, they celebrate comradeship and they mourn the death of friends and leaders. They bring to life a very clear picture of what it was like to be in control of an 'iron horse' and sometimes we can almost smell the wet coal and taste the hot sweet tea on an engine roaring through a dark and rainy night. Those railway poets might not all have been top of the class in spelling but they knew what they wanted to say and said it clearly..." (28).

- 137 See ed Islwyn Jenkins 1980 The Collected Poems of Idris Davies Llandysul: Gomerian Press Second Edition.
- 138 Ruth Shaw 'No Rickets in Rotherham' (in R Gwilt, ed 1983, 18) Compare the comment on Robert Bloomfield (Part I) by William Hazlitt (1819, 189); "not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom."
- 139 Joe Smythe is perhaps the clearest example.
- 140 Commonword: Manchester, 1980.
- 141 ed Rick Gwilt 1983, op cit, 18.
- 142 Charlie Dallimore in Bristol's Other History 1983, 15
- 143 Ada Iles in op cit, 2.
- 144 Blake Martin in A Derbyshire Town Remembered: Memories of South Normanton, undated, 32 (Postmill Press).
- 145 Zachariah Crashley in All in a Day's Work 1985 Yorkshire Art Circus, 5.
- 146 Leslie Piper (b 1908) The Times of Our Lives 1983 Peckham Publishing, 18.
- 147 William Muckle, 1981, No Regrets People's Publications, 28.
- 148 Isaac Gordon 1979 Going Where the Work Is Centerprise, 33
- 149 Lorraine 1984 Our Lives: Working Women Eden Grove Woemn's Writing Group, London N 1, 36, 37.
- 150 Jimmy McGovern 1983 'Compo' in R Gwilt (ed) Nineteen Eighty Three: A First Trade Union Annual Lancashire Association of Trades Councils Preston, 58.
- 151 Barry Heath 1981 M'Mam Sez Your Own Stuff Press Nottingham, 4-5.
- 152 Angela Mars 1982 'What happen black girl' in Maggie Hewitt, ed 1982 As Good as We Make it: Writing by Centerprise Young Writers Centerprise, 8.
- 153 Lucille Newman 1984 'Going to School' in Some Grit, Some Fire Centerprise, 19.
- 154 Lucille Newman, op cit, 86 'Crop Time'.
- 155 Page 141.
- 156 Ken Worpole, Local Publishing and Local Culture 1977 Centerprise, 10.



157. Les Moss 1979 Live and Learn, 10
- 158 Op cit, 63.
- 159 James Tracey 1977 Canary Men and Cobblers Strong Words, 6.
- 160 Winifred Eaton 1985 Bathtime Yorkshire Art Circus, 3.
- 161 Joan Richards, Idem, 17.
- 162 D Olson, 'From Utterance to Text: The bias of language in speech and writing' Harvard Educational Review Vol 47 No 3, August, 1977.
- 163 Daisy Noakes, 1980, 5.
- 164 Ibidem, 8.
- 165 John Bennett 1980 I was a Walworth Boy Peckham Publishing Project, 24,26,27.
- 166 Barbara Strang 1982 'John Clare's Language' in ed R K R Thornton, The Rural Muse: Poems by John Clare, 160.

Nine: Working-class Writers: the move into writing/publishing

- 1 "The spoken word is subjective. It is a human event which occurs over a segment of time within a living context. It is active, involved, vital. The written word, on the other hand, exists as an object. It is cut off from the flow of human events and exists frozen in silent space." P Lippert 'Forms of the Word' in International Society for General Semantics Et Cetera, Winter, 1982.
- 2 Part of a letter left for a 'viewer' at Cowpen Colliery Co Durham (April 1831) by miners who broke into his house, ate and drank but left furniture and occupants unharmed. (Quoted in M Vicinus 1974, 65).
- 3 Quoted in M T Hamerston 1981 On Becoming a Plumber Unpublished MA. dissertation, JLIIE
- 4 "...the old association between experience and experiment". Raymond Williams 1983 Keywords Fontana (revised edition), 126. Compare Robert Bloomfield's determination (Part I) that whatever he wrote on farming should be "EXPERIMENTALLY true".
- 5 See above (CH 7) for reference to such problems. Also note E P Thompson's useful distinction between what he has called Experience I (lived experience) and Experience II (perceived experience), in R Samuel (ed) 1981 People's History and Socialist Theory RKP 406
- 6 Nancy Martin writes (Times Educational Supplement 8 January 1982, 20). in reviewing Nella Last's War: A mother's Diary (eds) R Broad & S Fleming, Falling Wall Press): Writing is a distancing process. It seems possible that her continuous writing itself contributed to the changes within her. "
- 7 M Polanyi (1959) The Study of Man RKP.
- 8 Ron Barnes (Hackney) was brought up in straitened circumstances, suffering considerable ill-health. After minimal schooling he went from job to job before trying the 'taxi knowledge'. Licence to Live (1974) brought him considerable attention and some modest ACGS support for the writing of Coronation Cups and Jamjars (1976). He has published poetry as a member of Hackney Writers' Workshop and is a prolific painter (of scenes of East London working-class life.).
- 9 After his mother died (in 1918) Toby (aged 11) began to look after his paralysed father, missing most of his schooling in the process. When his father went finally into a nursing home Toby (now 24) was alone and homeless. He became a tramp. After eight years (1938) - including a spell in Canada stowing away on freight cars just as he had stowed away to get there - Toby came off the road and settled in Bristol. Settling down meant living in Leigh Woods in a hut he built of bits of timber etc. brought up by the river; sharing the woods with other tramps - and reading. Toby stayed there 29 years, until the press and TV took an interest: "I would still be in the woods but my hut was set fire to by hooligans." (Toby, 24) He now lives in a caravan that goes with his night watchman job. Toby's tape/transcript autobiography was published by Bristol BroadSides in 1979 and attracted a good deal of attention (local press, radio ).

- 10 Daughter of a S Yorkshire miner Julia Benson Young did a series of factory jobs before marrying (a miner) and having children. She began writing poetry and found encouragement in a 'mobile workshop' ('Verse Wagon') when it parked in Bawtry for a day. Publication of her work followed - also responsibility for the Doncaster Festival of Poetry and Folk Music and attendance at a residential course at Northern College. The transformation of her life is forcefully portrayed in her Getting Ideas (Yorkshire Arts Circus, 1984).
- 11 Leslie Wilson 's Dobroyed (Commonword, Manchester, 1981) is especially interesting with regard to issues of spelling and punctuation. This story of a year in Doboroyed Castle Approved School near Todmorden is (to quote the blurb) "the result of years of struggle by the author to, put down as honestly and accurately as possible his experience there and to overcome his lack of conventional spelling and grammar...Weeks and months were spent painstakingly writing down, rewriting and copying from exercise book diaries...The finished work has been re-written four times." The Commonword team record: "There was a lot of debate about turning all of Les's book into standard English. The problem is that while there are occasional difficulties for the reader in Les's original, Les's unique vision would be lost if his language was taken away from him." Hence the standard conventions of punctuation and spelling have been deliberately ignored. A result of this is that while meaning is scarcely ever at risk, the book demands considerably closer attention than most comparable autobiographies. The effort seems to be twofold: to give confidence that 'messages' may well be of interest despite problems with the surface features of the 'medium' (counterbalancing the usual tendency for the latter to be invoked to dismiss the former); at the same time the difficulties experienced point to the value of working at the conventions. Meanwhile the tidying up of some of his 'miscues' ('Rochstale', 'cellisiter', 'comforsation') would count as a loss - as would any ironing out of his highly distinctive idiolect: "...the actulecity of Todmorden may well of skiped and just jump for joy of freedom exitemants..." (On the promotion of care-over-spelling of a sense of a genuine audience and intrinsically interesting writing experience see Anderton, 1964; Sorensen and Kerstten, 1979).
- 12 Evacuated from Islington to Wolverton (Buckinghamshire) in 1940, Doris White worked on aircraft repairs in Wolverton LMS works. In 1975 she bought a typewriter and taught herself to use it; "I then wrote Twice round the lamppost (& London childhood) - unpublished. Milton Keynes writer-in-residence liked it and suggested "write about Doris". This led to D or Doris, V for Victory Oakleaf Books, 1981. Doris is rewriting her first book and considering a sequel to D for Doris...
- 13 Roger Mills (b 1954) went to a Clapton (E London) comprehensive school, then to a succession of jobs as 'paste-up man' in various advertising studios. Seeing the work of Ron Barnes and Vivian Usherwood in the Centerprise bookshop emboldened him to take in the writing he had been doing. He joined Basement Writers, Stepney, and later Hackney Writers' Workshop. In 1978 A Comprehensive Education was published; later he became a paid worker in

Tower Hamlets Arts Project (THAP). In 1983 he became FWWCP Literature Development Worker for the South of England (while ACGB funds lasted). He has written and published short stories and has been working on a novel.

- 14 Joe Smythe is a Manchester railway guard (after years of unsettled employment). An "omnivorous" reader from the start he got interested in poetry after being given a volume of Shakespeare. Contact with the Commonword (Manchester) group led to remarkable developments: in 1979 two volumes of poetry were published (Come and Get Me and Viva Whatsisname). In the same year he conceived the idea of publishing a further volume in 1980 to mark the 150th anniversary of the Liverpool-Manchester Railway. He approached the NUR who promptly agreed and gave him three months sabbatical to get on with the project. Working the "night shift" while his family were asleep upstairs Joe met the deadline with The People's Road. He writes prolifically - including in moments snatched in sidings between journeys. (Compare Bamford, Harris, Coombes, Dataller and, famously, Alfred Williams) He has published poems in several magazines - including often in Voices; he is especially interested in industrial poetry and working-class history.
- 15 Jimmy McGovern was brought up (the fifth of nine children of a working-class family) in Liverpool. After school he worked at a series of jobs - clerk, bus conductor, factory work. As a member of Scotland Road Writers' Workshop he trained for teaching and then worked in a Liverpool comprehensive school. In 1983 he took secondment to write for Channel 4 TV. A prolific writer, increasingly of plays (which have been successfully staged in the main Liverpool theatres).
- 16 Evelyn Haythorne was brought up in a South Yorkshire mining village. Unable through family financial circumstances to take up the grammar school place she won at 11 she went from secondary school to factory work (during World War II). More than thirty years on, during which time she was an occasional secret writer, she attended an adult education class where Brian Lewis, struck by her flair for oral story-telling, encouraged her to write about her life. Her autobiography (On Earth to Make the Numbers Up, 1981, Yorkshire Arts Circus) inspired a series of paintings and three stage plays which have toured pubs, clubs and schools in South Yorkshire - and has led to numerous T V and radio appearances. She has received a small ACGB grant to pursue her writing and is active in Yorkshire Arts Circus.
- 17 The nature and outcomes of Winston Smith's diary writing in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949, 1954) - the word 'therapy' is used on p 58 - would repay attention.
- 18 D Morley, & K Warpole, (eds) 1982. The Republic of Letters Comedia, 132.
- 19 'Life Histories and Ageing' at Policy Studies Institute, 27 November 1981. See also Report of Exploring Living Memory Day Conference 28 November 1981 5-6: 'The Therapeutic Uses of Reminiscence'.
- 20 A D Norris, & M A El Eileh 'Reminiscence Groups: A Therapy for both Elderly Patients and their Staff' in Oral History, 11,1, Spring, 1983.
- 21 "The Art and Therapy Co-operative is offering to help shy people be

creative. Do you know what to say, but just can't say it? Have you ever wanted to drum, dance, sing or paint, but don't feel you could? Do you need a place where it's safe to tell others what you really feel?" (Shopfront, Centerprise's Newsletter, May, 1983, 12).

- 22 Daisy Noakes (b. 1908) went into service from school. In 1975 she published The Town Beehive, an account of childhood and domestic service in and around Brighton up to her marriage in 1934. Then she acted as scribe while her (chronically disabled) husband George told his story (To Be a Farmer's Boy, 1977). This was followed by a booklet of Street Noises: Memories of Brighton 50 Years Ago. In 1980 appeared Faded Rainbow: Our Married Years, which brings Daisy's story up to the present. It takes in the difficulties of adjusting to marriage, coping with infested and insecure tied cottages; the long nursing of her husband through thirty years in a wheelchair. Daisy has written a novel and has toured with FWWCP in the USA.
- 23 B Heath, 1981.

Ten: Working-class writers, community-publishing and education

- 1 eg. see M Merson & R Campbell, 'Community Education: Instruction for Inequality' in M Golby, (ed) 1975 and H Entwistle, 1978 Class, Culture and Education Methuen, 88ff.
- 2 eg T Lovett, et al 1983, 39.
- 3 D Selby, 'Ideas for Action', Adult Education, vol 51, no 4, 245-247, quoted in J Thompson, 1980, 65.
- 4 C Fletcher, 'The theory of community education and its relation to adult education', in J Thompson, (ed) 1980, 67.
- 5 1958, quoted in O Kelly, 1984.
- 6 A Gramsci, 1971, 29, referred to in H Entwistle, 1978, 98.
- 7 See R Williams, 1958; Ron Barnes's distinction between the 'rough' and 'posh' ends of his street and his family (and in a sense of himself) is part of a project against seeing the working-class as amorphous (1974, 85-86; 1976, 66). See also Phyllis Willmott, 1979 Growing Up in a London Village for similar distinctions: eg. between parents who kept their children in and those who let them play where and with whom they liked.
- 8 See J D Grambs, 1965 'The Self-Concept: Basis for re-education of Negro Youth' in Lincoln Filene Centre for Citizenship and Public Affairs Negro Self Concept New York: McGraw-Hill, cited in H Entwistle, 1978, 191.
- 9 Cited in QueenSpark, No 24, Autumn 1979, 2. James Murphy raises doubts about working-class enthusiasm for education in T E S 9 11 84, 20-21.
- 10 Cited in G Sutherland, 1971, 7.
- 11 B Simon, (1983) 'The history of education' in P H Hirst, (ed). Educational Theory and its Foundation Disciplines R K P 62-83.
- 12 Mechanic's Magazine, No 7, 11 October, 1823, 100, quoted in B Simon (1960, 1974) 215.
- 13 S Frith, P Corrigan, 'The politics of education', in (eds) G Whitty & M F D Young, 1977 Society, State and Schooling Brighton: Falmer Press, quoted in J L Thompson, (ed) 1980 Adult Education for a Change 100, 99.
- 14 J F C Harrison, 1984 The Common People p 288.
- 15 J Kay The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Class in Manchester in 1832, republished in (1862) Four Periods of Public Education, pp 48-49, cited in B Simon, 1960, 1974 The Two Nations and the Educational Structure 1780-1870 Lawrence & Wishart, 168. Compare how Hannah More 'sold' her Mendip Sunday Sunday Schools to local farmers: as likely to "secure their orchards from being robbed, their rabbits from being shot, their game from being stolen and...lower the poor rates. F A Smith (1981) A History of Elementary Education 1760-1902, 1.
- 16 B Simon, 1983, 74, 75.

- 17 "Engels had often heard working men, whose fustian jackets scarcely held together, speak upon geological, astronomical and other subjects with great knowledge." Harrison, 1984, 293.
- 18 See, for example, Lowery (58-9); Somerville (91); Watson (in ed D Vincent, (1977) Testaments of Radicalism Europa (111); R Altick, (1967, 1963) 245 ff, D Vincent, 1981, 120ff; T Kelly, 1970 A History of Adult Education in Great Britain from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century (2nd edition), 142-144.
- 19 "Sometimes called dame school because these were often run by women" - JFC Harrison, 1984, 289
- 20 Harrison, 1984, 290-1 (drawing on H Hawkes, 1884, Recollections of John Pounds, 63-4, 135).
- 21 Lowery, 41.
- 22 The evidence about, and views taken of 'dame'/working-class 'private-venture' schools are conflicting. See eg G Sutherland, 1971, 12; P Gardner, 1984; R Altick, 1957, 147.
- 23 Samuel Smiles, (1859, 1910) Self-Help: With illustrations of conduct and Perseverance Murray: Introduction, ix.
- 24 B Simon, 1960, 1974 The Two Nations & the Educational Structure 1780-1870, 154.
- 25 Howitt's Journal, I (1847), Weekly Record, 17 April, 1847, 32, Quoted in J F C Harrison, 1961, 52.
- 26 C Dickens, (1937) Collected Papers, Vol II (The Nonesuch Dickens) London: The Nonesuch Press, 448-449. See also pp 373-378 (Leeds Mechanics' Institution); 515ff (Birmingham and Midland Institute).
- 27 Harrison, 1961, 50, 51, 52, 53.
- 28 Harrison, 1961, 54.
- 29 Harrison, 1961, 56.
- 30 Harrison, 1961, 52, 54, 55, 56.
- 31 Harrison, 1961, 57. Harrison sees World War I as a watershed in this respect: "The long line of self-educated working men - weavers poets, artisan naturalists, cobbler philosophers - continued until the First World War." 1961, 349.
- 32 In the 'Afterword' of FWWCP (1978) Writing (p 246) Chartist Ernest Jones is invoked: "A People's Education is safe only in a People's own hands;" the London Voices group draws attention to a continuity with the earlier tradition - in its meeting in a location - Clerkenwell Green - where 'mutual self-improving' working people met in the first 'moment'. See B Simon, 1960, 154.
- 33 B Simon, 1965, 202-203 NB D Finn, et al, 1977, 153: The Labour Party "began as an educational provider for the popular classes, not an educational agency of and within them."
- 34 Contributor and FWWCP AGM and Conference, 1981.
- 35 The full significance of the imposition of schooling on working-

class people is brought home in the following letter "typical of thousands which used to reach the Education Department and the offices of the School Boards from parents who were able to express their feelings on paper.

'I now write a few lines to you to ask you if my daughters can leave school because we cannot finde them in clothes and food and keep a home for them any longer without there help there Father his 60 years of age and he goes 4 miles every morning and four miles back that makes 8 miles a day and thenif it is fine all the week so he can work on the farm he gets 14s. but if it his wet he cannot work on the farm he his paid for the days he does work so his earning never amounts to more than 10s a week and very often under 10s in the winter months so what can we do if there should be any illness not a farthing to help ourselves with...4s rent for the house 4 children to keep in food and clothes to provide for in illness fireing and everything it really cannot be it his impossible...no wonder the farmers do not prosper when they oppress the labourers has they do andthis cruel cruel law of a school board it his too bad we cannot cannot do it because the climatehis not warme enuff for them to go without clothes.' "

(G Lowndes, 1969, 22)



Eleven: Conclusion

- 1 WCCPL & NUM (S Wales Area) 1985 Striking Back Cardiff, 20.
- 2 New Statesman, 22 March 1985, 26.
- 3 NUM 1984 Against All The Odds Sheffield, 1
- 4 Barnsley
- 5 Joint Newspaper of Durham Miners and Mechanics, Durham.
- 6 Strong Words, Whitley Bay.
- 7 North Yorkshire Women Against Pit Closures, Leeds, 1985
- 8 Cymbach (near Aberdare, Cynon Valley) Miners' Relief Fund Committee, 1984.
- 9 Written and illustrated by Frank and Allan Brammah (warehousemen of Keighley, West Yorkshire) during their lunch hours in Autumn, 1984; published by Yorkshire Arts Circus, Pontefract, 1985.
- 10 For example, those of the Richmond & Twickenham Miners and Families Support Campaign (poems by Ray Selby of Cresswell Colliery, Derbyshire).
- 11 See 'Taped', N Khan, New Statesman, 15 March, 1985, 39; also 4 October, 1985, 37.
- 12 eg 'The Enemies Within' DAC Theatre Company, Young Vic, August 1985. NB also the work of the Music Workshop, Consett, Co Durham.
- 13 The Heart and Soul of It: A documentation of how the 1984-85 Miners' Strike affected the people in the pit village of Worsborough and surrounding districts and of their survival, 1985, Worsborough: Worsborough Community Group and Bannerworks (People's History of Yorkshire, X).
- 14 M Hoyles, & S Hemmings, (eds), 1985, Martin Hoyles.
- 15 C Salt, & J Layzell, (eds), 1985, CRS.
- 16 Women Against Pit Closures, 29
- 17 Interview, Brian Lewis, 1985.
- 18 The Guardian, Tuesday, 18 June, 1985, 9.
- 19 The Heart and Soul of It (pages unnumbered).
- 20 Note the re-publication of some of this material in Poems of the Second World War: The Oasis selection ed V Selwyn, 1985 Dent.
- 21 S Rothwell, 1981 Lambeth at War SE1 People's History Project, 11. In the case of the strike some associations have been anything but temporary. See 'If They Need Us to Fight Again...' New Statesman, 7 June, 1985, 14-15.

- 22 John Torode (The Guardian, 10 September, 1985) represents 'novelty' differently: "...a novel aspect of coverage of the dispute - the emergence of the counter culture, coffee table book, best defined as an 'uneconomic' effort produced by community groups, art centres and support groups, subsidised by trades unions, the Arts Council, left-wing municipal authorities and individual members of the radical chic elite."
- 23 p 25.
- 24 1984 By the Sweat of Their Brow RKP
- 25 D Evans, 'King Coal's Other Face' The Guardian 4 April, 1984, 10.
- 26 International Women's Day News, 8 March, 1985, 11
- 27 Times Educational Supplement, 21 June, 1985, 26.
- 28 NUM, 1984, 21.
- 29 NUM, 1984, 32 Barbara Brookes, miner's wife, appeared at the Purcell Room benefit (alongside Dannie Abse, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Joolz and others).
- 30 NUM, 1984, 37.
- 31 Striking Back, 40. This and other contributions are attributed by place of origin: "It is a sign of the times that some of the volunteers who worked on the report have had to offer their solidarity anonymously for fear of reprisals..."(8).
- 32 Cymbach Miners and Women Speak Out, 7-8.
- 33 Striking Back, 45
- 34 Strike 84-85, 44
- 35 Striking Back, 153
- 36 Striking Back, 78
- 37 Strike 84-85, 23-24
- 38 Women Against Pit Closures, 34
- 39 'A Sad Tale of a Striker's Bride', Strike 84-85, 22.
- 40 NUM, 1984, 7.
- 41 NUM, 1984, 19.
- 42 Strike 84-85, 19
- 43 1985, Chatto & Windus, 337.
- 44 Strike 84-85, 19
- 45 Guardian, 5 June, 1985, 14
- 46 Striking Back, 33

- 47 Guardian, 19 February, 1985, 22
- 48 New Statesman, 7 June, 1985, 15
- 49 Striking Back, 33
- 50 R Hyman, London Review of Books, 6 June, 1985, 17
- 51 Interview, Brian Lewis, 1985.
- 52 Robert Lowery explains a tactic used during the Unstamped Press struggle: "An excellent plan was hit upon for evading prosecution. A person having one of the cellars under the arch of the Bridge on the 'Quay side', notice was given that the newspapers might be had there. Two holes were cut in the door, and on the outside it was printed, 'Put in your money and say what you want', and the paper asked for was put out through the hole when thus requested. Three or four volunteers were always inside, and so had the authorities broken open the door they could not have sworn which was the person who had sold the paper." (94-95).
- 53 Note the many working-class adaptations of well-known hymns in the 'first moment' (eg Vicinus, 1974) and since - by 'other ranks' in World Wars I and II.
- 54 "Collective habits and social behaviour are our field of inquiry, and individuals are only of interest insofar as they are typical of groups." Mass Observation, 9, London, 1937.
- 55 Superb examples are Burn (1855); Mark Benney (1936); Toby (1979).
- 56 For example, James Bezer: "...as John Nicholls has it, 'It may perhaps, appear ridiculous to fill so much paper with babblings of one's self; but when a person who has never known any one interest themselves in him, who has existed as a cipher in society, is kindly asked to tell his own story, how he will gossip!' Exactly so." (166) Also Roger Mills, see above.
- 57 On factors affecting patterns of place of publication see Klaus, 1985, eg. 8. On these and other aspects of publication see J Burnett, D Vincent, & D Mayall, 1985, xix; and Minority Press Group, 1980, 5.
- 58 Ralph Nader, 'Today,' BBC Radio 4, 27 April 1982.
- 59 J Raven, 1978 Victoria's Inferno Wolverhampton: Broadside, 13.
- 60 Cavalcade, 20 August, 1938.
- 61 Philip Howard, 'Let the workers write, so long as they can stand the scribbler's itch', The Times, 30 May, 1978, 14.
- 62 Setting problems for the bibliographer used to being able to pin publications on one or more individuals!
- 63 "The changes made in names and places are intended to prevent a too personal identification." A J Mundella's Introduction, ... v, in John Buckmaster's A Village Politician, 1897, T Fisher Unwin (1982, Horsham: Caliban Books, Introduction by John Burnett). See Ragon, 1974, on the

widespread use of pseudonyms among French working-class writers.

- 64 "Alan: My grandfather had to work until he was 72 to get enough NI stamps. He was in the NUM. He started it in Aberaman, taking money outside the gate. He started the union off in the valley. He was jailed because of trying to start a union, blacklisted by the Coal Board because of it." Cymbach Miners & Women Speak Out, 10
- 65 Introduction, 11.
- 66 Bonfire Press, incorporating Dustbin Press, Union Place (undated).
- 67 See, eg, eds J Burnett, D Vincent, & D Mayall, 1984 The Autobiography of the Working-Class: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography Vol 1, 1790-1900, xviii
- 68 DES, 1975 A Language for Life HMSO; HMI 1979 Aspects of Secondary Education HMSO
- 69 'John Craven's Newsround', BBC 1, 28 November, 1984.
- 70 eg R Williams, K Worpole, (transcribed interview) 'Making It Active' in The English Magazine, 1, Spring, 1979, 4-7; Raphael Samuel, 1981, 410. Home Study (NEC, Cambridge) - eg No 3, 1980.
- 71 "It seems to me entirely possible that the upshot of schooling for some people is a lifelong alienation from the knowledge and, more generally, culture which schools can transmit, and sometimes an alienation from anything that smacks of schooling, so that even the pigeon-fancier comes to prefer the safety of existing practices to learning about new ones." T Pateman, 1980 Can Schools Educate? Lewes, Sussex: Jean Stroud.
- 72 "Blatherskite" (Heslop); "literary nancy-boy" (Hodge); "wankers and creeps" (C Richards 1981/2, 67-79).  
See also Coombes (Ch 4) note 243 above; and Ch 5, note 9.
- 73 Note the current widespread re-learning of old lessons in order to protect and survive.
- 74 If they are to do this they will need to keep abreast of developments which, given dominant patterns of publication and distribution, etc, quite often remain obscure. Mervyn Jones, chosen by the New Statesman to review N Jackowska (ed) Voices from Arts for Labour Pluto and B Baker & N Harvey (eds) Publishing for People London Labour Library, was to write (25 October, 1985, 28) "I see... that there is now a Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers and that 160 worker writers, from 30 workshops up and down the country, attended the 1985 gathering." (my emphasis).

APPENDICES

Appendix One - Cab Trade News November, 1937: Front Cover

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Appendix Two: Herbert Hodge: "Trying out the philosophy"

The 'philosophy' series rests on beliefs from which Hodge never swerved: firstly, in the dangers of labels and slogans, of purely theoretical political/religious system-building; secondly, in the need to analyse, to start from the characteristics of whatever 'individual human nature' can be shown to exist prior to what any cultural/social/political/religious system might graft on to it; thirdly, in carrying that analysis forward as the only possible basis for developing a socialist society. In short, he resists the explanation of human behaviour as chiefly determined by, for example, social, political and economic systems:

"When all due allowances for the effect of environment upon the individual have been made, I still maintain that Man makes the System, and the System does not make Man "

CTN, December, 1936

and dwells on what seem to him the formal logical flaws in, and the evidence that stood against, extreme determinist accounts. Having expounded (November, 1936) parabolically the behaviour of three ideal-type cab drivers, Tom, Dick and Harry in a rush-hour situation that demands significant/revealing choices he first points out that although all "are motivated by the same belly-urges, Vanity, Greed, Fear and Lust ...their individual behaviour is very different." Then (December, 1936) he concludes:

"My whole point is that the same environment acting on different men, results in different behaviour. It is a self-evident fact in our everyday life; we see proof of it in our human every (sic) contact; yet it is a fact which in political theory is consistently ignored."

(This substantial discounting of differential experiences within the same global environment was to crop up again and bring him into conflict with a section of colleague readership). What is of chief

importance in considering these drifts in Hodge's work is the importance he attached to working people's resistances in the face of heavy systemic odds.

Hodge defined his project in breathtakingly ambitious terms:

"I want to...measure (Man) physically, spiritually, psychologically; to find out, so far as I can, why he does what he does."

A month later (May, 1936) he prefixes a preamble "For new readers":

"We are cosmic workmen. We are dissatisfied with our present social system and want to build a new one. Mankind is our material. Before we begin to build, we want to know something about our material. We are, therefore, making this inquiry into human nature."

Having drawn up his agenda he proceeds spaciouly about his analysis. The articles are impressively and revealingly allusive. (Sterne, The Bible, Darwin, Shaw, Nietzsche and Lenin is the harvest of one article alone - April, 1936); there is perhaps a hint of pride in the names he drops and while at times his references clutter without forwarding the argument at others they are extremely apt. In May, 1936, urging the importance of not shrinking from unpleasant facts he quotes Kipling:

"Truth is a naked lady, and if by accident she is drawn up from the bottom of the sea, it behoves a gentleman either to give her a print petticoat or to turn his face to the wall and vow he did not see."

In the same article he makes reference to a diary entry - presumably grateful to cab drivers (!) - Thomas Hardy made after a trip to London:

"Note the weight of a landau and pair, the coachman in his grey greatcoat, the footman ditto. All this mass of matter is moved along with brute force and clatter through a street congested and obstructed, to bear the petite figure of the owner's young wife in violet velvet and silver trimmings, slim, small; who could be easily carried under a man's arm, and who, if held up by the hair and slipped out of her clothes, carriage etc, etc, aforesaid, would not be much larger than a skinned rabbit, and of less use."

Hodge adopts a range of roles, styles and tones in these articles:

-by turns lecturer, preacher, popular educator, street orator and conversational companion; lofty, intimate, portentous, plain, a touch pompous, parabolic, pellucid, direct...In exposition and argument,



impressively and unevenly, he emerges as a beginning writer about the business of 'finding a voice'.

In pursuit of the essence of human nature (!) Hodge devoted article five (June, 1936) to:

"examining the belly, the basis of all animal life, an organism motivated solely by greed, fear, vanity and lust."

to considering what he kept calling "belly urges." In article six Hodge reports some feedback from parts of 'the readership on the rank'; chiefly shock and disgust at his use of the word "belly". Reflecting on this later Hodge writes:

"When I pointed out to (the editor) how gentle my stuff was - how respectably Victorian in fact, compared with say, Swift, or Smollett - he said we'd become more civilised since then."

#### It's Draughty in front, 259

(As this charge was later tacitly conceded by the editor in question, the episode provides a marker along the path of shifting attitudes to language use among working-class readers, a pointer to contemporary expectations about writing in a trade union journal. Certainly Hodge was, after this incident, widely known among readers of CTN as "the bellies gentleman.")

But Hodge's use of language was not the only cause for concern. While they were at it his critics took the opportunity to ask when his philosophising was going to get to the point: the readership was becoming restive. Much later (September, 1938) the editor remembered it thus:

"...when, after ten months had gone by, we hadn't been given the slightest inkling of what Hodgism was going to be, we began to get a little weary. I addressed urgent appeals to him to save the situation by skipping a few instalments to give us just one little clear-cut idea, and then, if necessary, work back from it; but no, he was adamant. So we, and the world, were denied even a glimpse of that light which is still to come!"

He as well as Hodge had tried from episode one to encourage response from the readership:

"This challenging article should excite much comment. Why not put it on paper and send it in? - Ed." (October, 1936).

Hodge, in article six had already indicated the kind of writer/reader relationship he had in mind:

"We are making this inquiry together...write to me...and let me have your views." (July, 1936)

When two critics did respond (December, 1936), both of apparently determinist views - one wanting to stress the influences of environment on behaviour, the other challenging (in the context of Hodge's "belief that the study of psychology is as necessary as the study of economics for the would-be builders of a Socialist system") the value of psychology as a science, and offering some spirited heckling, Hodge took a month off from analysis and exposition to confront his critics.

The result is interesting and suggestive, providing pointers to Hodge's intellectual development at this stage as to the value of interaction to the erstwhile street corner speaker. While on the one hand he wastes valuable space in arguing petty matters and falls to trading abuse, on the other the shift from monologue to dialogue sharpens him into more lucid, better argued, more readable exposition.

Finally, the editor foreclosed on him and with article number fourteen Hodge brought the series to a premature end.

While no one seemed to doubt the series had been a failure, the impressiveness of the attempt - to handle disparate bodies of complex material in the context of building a framework of analysis and developing an argument; to join difficult discourses; to engage with recalcitrant problems; and to take on the unpopular role of populariser (in a strict sense of the term) deserves recognition. Hodge's energy, optimism and commitment, his high expectations about the seriousness and intellectual capacity of his fellow cab-drivers, deserve celebration. However, the opening paragraphs of his final piece indicate he felt he had misjudged his colleagues:

"This month I am bringing the present series to a close. It seems that the majority of readers do not care for a series of this type in their trade journal, and the Editor has asked me to conclude it with this issue.

I shall therefore have to leap several flights of stairs in my step-by-step method of reasoning, and briefly summarise my conclusions. The minority who may have been interested in that simpler, if slower, method, will be able to follow it much more easily in book form later, without these appalling monthly gaps that make serialising so difficult for both reader and writer." CTN, March, 1937

There is here a hint of hurt feelings and a sense of rejection (evidenced elsewhere); also implications of the (surely wrong) conclusions he draws about his readers. The second paragraph contains clues, perhaps, to the true situation, clues that at the time he failed to 'read'. Hodge seems to have mistaken the nature and potential of monthly journalism; this, in turn, led him to draw wrong conclusions about his readers. There is no evidence that CTN readers could not cope with in-depth analysis, nor that they wanted instant political prescription. Certainly, the evidence in the pages of CTN, its fundamental seriousness, the sheer space devoted to ample discussion of crucial issues, all tends against this. But a lengthy exposition, running perhaps to two years' worth of monthly instalments was clearly inappropriate to a journal that was read very often (mostly?) in the cab or the cab shelter, and by, like most journals, a casual as well as a stable readership. This is implicitly recognised as a problem from article number four, when a resume of the argument-so-far plus a statement of the direction of the overall project is prefixed to the articles. As for reader-participation - this was presumably more likely as a response to conclusions and proposals than to exposition. It is interesting that such responses as were elicited arose when Hodge reached the point of offering some firm conclusions about the roots of individual human behaviour.

Appendix Three -- Fact: Titles and Authors, Numbers 1-22

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Contents pages:                      Cab Sir?                      and 'I Drive a Taxi

Cab Sir?

Part 1: Cabman's Day

From the driver's seat

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Night

After the Lord Mayor's Show

Part 2: Mainly about You

Tips and Tippers

Drunks

Rum Customers

Jane and Richard

These Twain

Bilkers

Dear Sir and Madam

Part 3: Mainly about Us

Midnight on the old mark

Cabologically Speaking

Numbers Up

My goodness, my gamp!

Man behind the Badge

Strictly Business

Starving Mush

Picture in the Tate.

# I DRIVE A TAXI

*by Herbert Hodge*

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY  
RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Appendix Five: Socialist pilgrimage/travelogue: Two examples

In 1936 the Durham Miners' Association sent a November delegation of seven to Russia. On their return the association published their report A Visit to Russia (1937). It described their journey; the wages and conditions in the Kirov Works (Lenigrad); a reception at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow:

"Stalin was dressed in a khaki coloured tunic and looked remarkably fit and well. He received a great reception, and there was no mistaking the affection the people had for him. Those newspapers who have reported him to be a sick man would have had a great surprise had they seen how well and fit he looked "; (p 8)

the November celebrations in Red Square; domestic life; education; social services; pensions; workers' compensation; but, chiefly and running to some 27 pages, mining matters. The seven delegates reported enjoying freedom to see whatever they asked; their enthusiasm for what they learned of the Stakhanovite movement; their first flat objection to the idea (commonplace in Russia) of women working underground - and approval of the 18 years minimum age for underground workers (most of the delegates had started at 14 or 15): all in all, an apparently balanced judgement of the material conditions they had been able to inspect at first hand:

"We think, however, that so far as the actual things money will buy are concerned, the employed miner in Britain is on the average much better off than the Russian miners, but if everything is taken into consideration - holidays, rest home, surety of employment, and social insurance - then the difference is considerably less." (22-28)

In 1952 cab-section colleagues of the T & G W U financed Geoff Stevens to visit the U S S R in May. That such delegations were taken seriously and were not uncommon is suggested by remarks in CTN, February, 1952:

"The length of these visits generally is three weeks... Because such a visit is not just a holiday, the usual procedure that is followed is to prepare beforehand what a delegate or delegates is expected to report back on. . In other words, the branches and members prepare a list of the things, places and developments, etc, they want their delegates to inspect while in the Soviet Union."

On his return Geoff Stevens reported to a well-attended meeting at the 'Orange Tree', Euston Road, (see below) and contributed five lengthy and euphoric articles - 'A Cabman in the U S S R' to C T N (June, 1952 to January, 1953). (Cp Benson, Ernie (1980) To Struggle is to Live Vol II, 278-279).

IMAGE REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



Appendix Six - Roger Dataller:including parallels/contrasts with BL Coombes

Roger Dataller grew up in Yorkshire and worked, in turn, as bottle-washer in a mineral-water factory, carter, steel-worker - then, for eight years, as a miner. In 1925 he published From a Pitman's Notebook - a digressive, diary-form account of experiences-plus-reflections-upon-them covering the period September, 1922 to August, 1924. Dataller won a Mines' Welfare Scholarship to Oxford - entering the university in October, 1928 - and while there researched and wrote the life of the early nineteenth century radical, Major John Cartwright. Dataller's Oxford experiences are the subject of his second book A Pitman Looks at Oxford (1933). Near the end of that book he recalls that Raymond Postgate "had advised (him) to try (his) hand at fiction." (198) His next book, also published in 1933, was a novel: Uncouth Swain. It is set in Yorkshire in 1816, in a period of appalling conditions and violent conflict between coal owners and miners. The hero, Edward Holiday, is a collier and autodidact who spends six hours each week Sunday School teaching in the "dissenting tabernacle". Promoted to overman he is soon required by the owner, Sir Bracey Higgett, to identify and remove radicals from the work force. When Sir Bracey is shot dead Holiday is wrongly arrested and narrowly escapes the gallows. Dataller's Oxford research is everywhere apparent - for example in his getting right details of what was on sale in a Doncaster radical bookshop in 1816 and in having Holiday attend a meeting nearby at the King's Head where the speaker is - Major Cartwright. There is an implicit appeal back to the tradition of Cobbett and his period generally and, in Holiday's final words a homily on gradualism:

"The school's my way," he continued. "It's a slow way, I agree, an' maybe I'll get tired on it in the end; but the truth as I do see it...is to make them kids in mind and spirit bow down to nowt but what you might call the good in man." (308)



After Oxford Dataller returned (October, 1931) to the Yorkshire coalfield as an "adult education organiser". The beginnings of this phase of his life, up to 1934, are recorded in Oxford into Coalfield (1934). In 1935 he published a play, The Prince of Obolo: A Comedy; Three Industrial Plays followed in 1936. In 1938 a second novel appeared: Steel Saraband - set in a steel town where (a familiar idea nowadays!) the mills are to be 'rationalised'. Walter Haddon is a chargehand and therefore, like Edward Holiday in Uncouth Swain, is caught between bosses and workers. He works nights and the demands of work contribute to estrangement from his wife Freda, who eventually decamps with a man from the WEA. Chapel, Labour politics, evening classes, passion, infidelities - and, as background to all, the white heat of furnaces and the roaring mill evoked in deft prose poetry. Finally, in 1940, came The Plain Man and the Novel - warmly recommended for discussion groups by B L Coombes (The Neath Guardian, 29 November, 1940). It explores what appeals to the Plain Man (Roger Dataller, roughly) among novels (Plain Books, more or less:

"The Plain Man's...prime interest is in a story...Ideas are relatively unimportant"(viii) "The Plain Man...remains unattracted by...literary handsprings"(ix)

For present purposes the most interesting section (68-79) 'Intimations of Industry' looks at novels written by working-class men: J C Welsh (The Underworld); F C Boden (Miner; also Pit-Head Poems); Jack Jones (Rhondda Roundabout); Harold Heslop (Gate of a Strange Field, Last Cage Down); James Hanley, T. Thompson, Leslie Halward, Walter Greenwood (Love on the Dole); Walter Brierley (Means Test Man, Sandwichman).

From early on Dataller contributed to journals: some of From a Pitman's Notebook first appeared in the Adelphi; some of Oxford into Coalfield in Life and Letters and the Manchester Guardian. Like B L Coombes he entered and won literary competitions (see, for example, From a Pitman's Notebook, 179)

Roger Dataller is of interest to the present study because his influence on B L Coombes can be confidently inferred and because for all the divergence of their careers/experience the similarities and parallels within their writing (which I sketch below) are so marked.

There is much in the work, experience, values and attitudes of Roger Dataller that both parallels what is to be found in B L Coombes and, I believe, suggests the influence of the one on the other. In what follows first some parallels (from points of detail to major matters of value and belief) are suggested and, second, because it is to a central purpose of this study, Dataller's approach to educating his former miner colleagues is considered.

Like B L Coombes (real name Bertie Louis Coombs Griffiths), at times Herbert Hodge and certainly many of his colleagues on Cab Trade News, 'Roger Dataller' is, and used, a pseudonym. (Dataller: 'day-tale-reckoning; day-taler- day-labourer, workman engaged by the day', O E D; "men ... who work below on a flat wage" (F Zweig, op cit, 23)). Beyond this he invented a name for his colliery (Notebook, 11) and disguised actual people and places by the use of devices like 'S-', 'R-W-' etc (as do Harold Heslop and Walter Brierley). In evoking pit-life, not surprisingly the same dangers and grimness are recorded (one is struck by just how many deaths/serious accidents Dataller was close to in a matter of months: Notebook); yet, like Coombes, he is similarly alive to the coexisting beauty (eg his noticing growth sprouting from a Norwegian pit-prop - Notebook, 98). Above ground, his account of a bailiff eviction for non-payment of rent, of the grief, indignation and neighbourly solidarity entailed (Notebook, 96-97) parallels Coombes. (These Poor Hands, 224-225).

Dataller as writer-craftsman is, like Coombes, uneven. He is generally economical, rarely allowing an incident more words than the efficient minimum; his accounts of serious injuries, etc are terse and understated. Yet, as with Coombes, his style is very often tiresome, irritating, pompous, high falutin'. Examples: (from Notebook) "Screw as I might I couldnot give it increase" (52 - when his lamp goes out,

perhaps it needs adding); "And if you think there is any doubt about the matter, why then go yourself and labour in the place, and make a personal testing of the whole business" (121); and a manner that seems to blend the influence of two earlier diarists - Pepys and Pooter - "8 September, 1922. "To 'Nanook of the North' - second house - Marion & I...would to God that I had but a tithe of his (Nanook's) accomplishment." (From A Pitman Looks at Oxford: "Than he, I cannot imagine what the Dean of a great college should look like" (184)).

Notebook sets out to "present a faithful picture of colliery conditions...a human plea" (11). Dataller calls it a "Journal"; it is, like Coombes's books, a blend of reminiscence, reportage, reflection etc. He displays, similarly, a fictive/dramatic tendency. Narratives are at times highly-wrought; an example is (Notebook, 52ff) the account of his lamp going out when he was working alone. The piece - stream-of-consciousness suggesting mounting panic barely held in check, heightened noises of timber cracking and potentially predatory mice and rats scurrying about in the total blackness - could without alteration be offered as a short story - like, say, Coombes's 'The Flame'. Dataller frequently (for purposes of economy and providing variety, and as part of the distancing process referred to below) writes brief dialogues in play-form (Notebook, 174, 181, 185-6, 194). This device perhaps grows out of the snatches of dialogue, rendered as verbatim, he includes, a practice already noted in respect of Coombes. An example from Dataller of the latter: "'It's all book knowledge,' said one chap the other night. 'I'll bet yon bloke can't make a rabbit hutch.' 'E's none so daft', returned another: 'e gets 'is livin' wi'out workin' an' that's more'n you or me can do! (Notebook, 43-44)."

Like Coombes, Dataller mentions (sometimes parades) his reading: Gogol, Tolstoy, Belloc, Sitwell, O., The New Testament, William Archer, H M Tomlinson, Edmund Blunden, 'Anatomy' Burton. Like Alfred Williams 1877-1930, 'hammerman' in Swindon Railway Works, Dataller read at work when the opportunity arose (for example See Notebook, 131). As his social experience broadened - at Oxford and after - he began to drop name after illustrious name: for example, Harold Acton, R H Tawney, G D H Cole, Edmund Blunden, G K Chesterton, Dean Inge, Housman, Gilbert Frankau, the Hammonds, Raymond Postgate, Ronald Knox, Rabindranath Tagore, James Maxton, H A L Fisher, Harold Laski. After dedicating his first book to M-(Marion, whom he married) and acknowledging Middleton Murry, he chose R H Tawney for Oxford into Coalfield and Gilbert and Mary Murray for Uncouth Swain.

Dataller's political position is not entirely clear, as is the case with Coombes. There is an example of this in Notebook (267) in a passage where Dataller seems to be saying that if employers ran their business better, taking more account of the welfare of their employees, nationalization might not be necessary. The positive case for public ownership is not pressed. Coombes is often found reserving his position. For example, more than once in celebrating Arthur Horner as union leader he makes sure that no-one could identify him with the latter's politics: "As I once heard Arthur Horner say, 'It is not what you drink, but who you drink with that classifies you.' Whether we agreed with his politics or did not Horner remained faithful to his mates." (Neath Guardian, 11 May, 1962) "I believe honestly that he is the best President we have ever had, and that tribute comes from a man who has not followed him politically - in fact I don't know that I have followed anybody". Those Clouded Hills, 33.

This ushers in what, for present purposes, are the most telling comparisons. Dataller, like Coombes, addressed a readership both

physically and socially remote (see especially Notebook, 156, 158: "'a catlick wash' as we say up here" (my emphasis); "to whom shall I reveal? I want to tell the clean-faced city worker that A NATION lives within the mines..."). Dataller also was simultaneously 'insider' and 'outsider'; similarly as with Coombes every line he wrote suggested first that he rejected many aspects of pitman culture, and second that he was convinced of the superiority of 'elite' 'high-culture'. (Like the protagonists of his two novels (see above) Dataller is interestingly, caught in 'nomansland': they between bosses and workers, he between classes and cultures).

The following passages gives a full flavour of Detaller's predicament and attitudes:

"One struggles as for one's very soul for days and weeks on end against the utter placidity of the daily thought and common speech of such a place as Tollgate. The most unthinking miner seems far happier than I. For him the clean, strong wind of morning, the thoroughbred dog, lean and elegant, his pint or two at the 'Nag's Head' or whatever 'Cat and Codfish' he is supposed to frequent; an indiscriminating appreciation of the 'Pictures'. He is quite content to live without Debussy or Picasso (sic). Chaliapin stands for less than a name to him. Of Rosing he has never heard. And yet he is content...there are occasions when M and I seem absolutely isolated, walking, the only substantial beings, in a world of dim dream shadows with whom we can never really come into contact try as often as we may. The newly printed lists of municipal electors they nail up in the public place are remembrances of souls that never have been - the 'Dead Souls' of Gogol's masterpieces, how many thousands here I do not care to tell..." (Notebook, 91-92) (M is Marion, the school teacher he later married).

In this the correspondences with Coombes are striking. The reference to the "Pictures" is one example. Dataller warms to this theme elsewhere:

"The Picture Palace stands as a kind of half-way house, (between the public-house on the one hand, and the local conventicle on the other), a strange fraternal No Man's Land where saints and sinners, publicans and Pharisees, from the local pundits downwards, disport themselves upon the red-plush seats." (Notebook, 178).

In Oxford into Coalfield he remarks in exasperation:

"we bring the whole heritage of culture, in fee for the asking, and lay it at their feet. They are not interested." (76)

Witheringly, he adds that they prefer Jean Harlow and Wallace Beery.

Elsewhere he mentions a cinema manager having to take off Private Lives (starring Norma Shearer and Robert Montgomery) because the miners

"won't have it". They prefer musical comedy (The Maid of the Mountains)

but, interestingly, not "gangster films and cowboy rough stuff. Enough

rough stuff down below." (Oxford into Coalfield, 167) (Not to be

missed is the account of a miners' production of The Merchant of

Venice playing in the Welfare Hall at Raddock (an actual place named!)

to an audience of over 6500 - an audience there, and impatient, for

the dancing that was to follow. (Oxford into Coalfield, 158-156).

The attitude towards pub life (see, for example, the tongue-in-cheek

reference to "drinking-den loungers" - Notebook, 187) could be explored

in the same way and a Coombes-like posture would become apparent.

Whereas Pearl White attracts Coombes's sharpest condemnation 'artificial silks' time and again bring out the puritanical worst in Dattall:

"(The miners') wives and sisters...chatter along to the local Welfare with skirts of artificial silk swishing about their ankles. Later, they will slip across the roadway for the customary snack of fish and chips, and gaily eating these, return to streamer, crooner, and hot rhythm.

Then there is always a bus into town, there to mingle with the crowds that swarm into the cinemas, cafes, dances, whistdrives..." (Oxford into Coalfield, 65-66).

Dattall's attitude towards Doncaster Races (September, 1933) - a big day annually for local miners and their families - is especially revealing for what he notices: "The charlatans have come to town - tipsters, bookies, punters, gipsies..." and "waiting - as lambs for the slaughter - (are) the clientele of South Yorkshire." His verdict:

"Throughout it all - crowd, colours, and horses notwithstanding - a generally pervading sense of boredom...Quite joyless." (Oxford into Coalfield, 149-154)

Dataller's killjoy puritanism is plain but unimportant. What matters is what he failed to understand about the feelings and participation of those around him: a failure of imagination. It is instructive to compare this passage with Evelyn Haythorne's account of her (mining) family's outings to the same event in On Earth to Make the Numbers Up (A People's History of Yorkshire - 2, 1981)

"The September Leger week was the traditional treat in the area... I loved that walk for Racecourse Road, on such occasions, was filled with women wearing coloured cotton frocks and men in grey flannel bags and sports coats. Big cars, with race-horse owners and bookies, tooted their horns as they weaved their way through the milling corwds; and always there was the sound of the Salvation Army bands. Standing on boxes were men dressed in colourful racing silks selling tips...Two or three strong men, in next to nothing, broke out of straight jackets and chains beside stalls selling everything from brightly dressed dolls in paper frocks to monkeys on a piece of elastic...blind men and crippled singers, victims of the war...My dad always put some coppers into their tins saying, "Poor buggers, look what they've got for fighting for King and Country. Thrown on't scrap heap and begging for a living."... I loved to hear (the) hoof beats and to see the clouds of earth and grass fly into the air as they passed...In between races we would sit on the grass, eat the sandwiches that mother had made for us and watch dad study form in the newspaper. We would also keep a look out for the man who sold William pears and Victoria plums from a tray fastened to his shoulders...Round the back of the pub was a small yard with a couple of iron tables and wooden forms... Next to the pub was a butcher's shop where mother would buy some "souse"...When dad thought that most of the crowd had gone we would go for the Edlington bus. Almost as a ritual he would then pull out a packet of Parkinson's Doncaster Butter Scotch and give us each a square wrapped in its own little bit of silver paper. The rest, he said should be saved for another day." (14-17).

A further neat example of Dataller's 'outsider' posture as regards mining culture is what he has to say about stealing in the mine. In Notebook he devotes a page (93) to the question "Do Miners Pilfer?" He catalogues the odd things that go missing (including an early version of the wheelbarrow story) and mentions the personal loss (to a thief of "amazing Catholicity") of "'Who Killed Cock Robin?' a pungent criticism of a certain school of poetry by Osbert Sitwell, and a copy of the New Testament." The important point is his (real or feigned) incomprehension of stealing and the anthropological posture he adopts in exploring the matter. Here a telling comparison is with Bill Jones's

piece on stealing among dockers at Liverpool (Writing, 169-172, F W W C P).  
 (Compare also discussions of stealing: Working Lives I (Centerprise)  
 1976, 31-50; Hello, Are You Working? (Strong Words) 1977, 20).

The difference of perspective and attitude is part of the difference between working-class writing in the 'Second' and 'Third' moments and is taken up elsewhere in the study.

So far the stress has fallen on those characteristics, attitudes, cultural patterns of his fellow miners with which Dataller is out of sympathy. In discussing these - and typically, as with Coombes, in rendering the experiences he shares with his colleagues - he adopts a 'spectator role'. His observer stance is especially well illustrated in a passage in Notebook (176-180) where he describes going to church and a 'Social' afterwards (ending "I wanted none of their company, and I wished myself elsewhere"; 177) and, walking down the village street evoking the nosiness of pit village life (which "other pens" might portray as close-knit communal solidarity!):

"Your every movement is followed by pertinacious eyes". (179)  
 Even when describing a fatality/emergency in the mine he keeps half an eye on how his mates react, distancing his account. He rarely uses 'we'; rarely does admiration and empathy flow, unchecked by irony. Hence it is refreshing when he allows his mates' humour to proclaim itself, unmediated: for example, when, having narrowly escaped death from a fall which cut them off from their clothes a team of men come to the surface, one "clad only in a pair of flimsy cotton drawers":

"Where do you live?' I asked.  
 'M-' he answered, 't'other side, a distance of three miles or more.'  
 'Put a number on the back an' run whoam,' said Morgan. 'They'll think thou art an 'Arrier.'" (Notebook, 228)

However, as with Coombes, notice who gets to speak 'Standard' and who doesn't).

Dataller's aspiration to participate in an elite, high-culture was consummated at Oxford. His utter seduction by Oxford is inscribed in



passage after passage of A Pitman Looks at Oxford - for example in the account of his first tutorial:

"It is all very leisurely and charming. I enter, essay in hand, he asks will I smoke, wherupon he sinks in a deep chair and lights up. We discuss my health, he asks about M.; we compare topography - Yorkshire with that of Sussex, from whence he comes; chat a little about pictures; anything almost but the subject matter of the eighteenth century, when - lo! imperceptibly we have drifted into a consideration of Shelburne's political faith. It is all so intimate and engaging. I depart with an invitation to tea, and an appalling number of books to read..." (36-37)

It is easy to share his sense of delight in this civilised ritual but not the superior, patronising attitude adopted towards the pit-villager who asks, one vacation,

"Are you head of your form at Oxford College?"(78)

and towards the Ruskin men he encountered at Oxford:

"There are odd times when one wonders whether (always with exception) the best type of working class student ever enters Ruskin. There is an air of the Trade Union arriviste about so many - a type with which one becomes so familiar in Trade Union organization. I have never been accused of preserving particular reverence for the blank, self-effacing undergraduate; but I must confess that there are moments when the 'hefty, hearty son of toil' representative gives me a pain. 'Hullo, lads, here's the grub,' bawled a Ruskin man on entering my room, and eyeing a table set for tea. Nothing significant, of course. A mere peccadillo on my part, perhaps, to make mention of it. Only...one wishes that he hadn't said it in quite that way. In my time I have encountered a good deal of communal singing - hearty, wholesome stuff; the fervent voice, free fellowship, and all the rest of it - the breath of reality among the thin-blooded pedants of the university; but there are limitations to Annie Laurie and Tom Brown's Body, and twelve midnight is one of these. I speak advisedly when I declare that 'Oft in the stillly night, ere slumber's chain has bound me,' I have wished it possible to transport Ruskin and its folk-songs to the middle of a blasted heath."

(A Pitman Looks at Oxford, 136-137)

Tom Harrisson (1933, 15-16) writes: "I consider (A Pitman Looks at Oxford) to be a contemptible book, and Mr Dataller to have let himself and his class down as usual...In the last paragraph of his foreword he shows clearly this Oxseduction, which gets at the Colliers, the Indians, Ruskin men and Rhodes Scholars just as much as at the Wykhamists and Bedford Moderns, bringing them all to a common level of sentiment and content".

The argument has been, then, that Dataller, like Coombes, stands away from his colleagues. He is more spectator than participant; an 'insider' in the sense that he is/has been a miner and talks on mining matters with the authority that comes from that, an 'outsider' in that he looks inwards, puts his colleagues in a frame, represents and reports on them to outsiders with whom he seems to have more in common. He deplores what he sees as the poverty of mining culture:

TEXT REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER  
LEGAL ISSUES



(From a Pitman's Notebook, 269)

Here, as acquaintance with much of the miner-writing referred to in the present study suggests (and compare Ferdinand Zweig's remarks in op cit Ch xx) he is simply ill-informed - his ignorance deriving

from a blinkered view of what count as legitimate, respectable cultural products. However, where working-class people share his assumptions and prejudices (for 'serious' study and elite culture, for example) Dataller is proud and admiring: these are the working men and women he is keen to celebrate, to offer an unqualified - though still a somewhat patronising - respect, to recommend to the readership 'down there':

"A glimpse of the Oxford 'Greats' list in the Manchester Guardian today sent me ranging eagerly for familiar names. I see that D-, a shrewd ex-Northumberland miner, has secured a first."  
(Oxford into Coalfield, 16 The same miner who, short of money for the train, cycled down to Oxford to take up his place).

Dataller records conferences and meetings eagerly attended by people with little free time and fewer resources: fifteen people plus a mother and baby for a three-hour session on 'Modern Tendencies in Industry' (Oxford into Coalfield, 26); a women's meeting on Mary Wollstonecraft and The Rights of Women, Jane Austen and Florence Nightingale (with Gospel singing from next door coming through the partition - *ibid*, 29); the high seriousness of members of an Aberystwyth summer school eschewing the beach (and strains of 'The Sun has got his Hat on') for psychology, literature, economics etc. He talks of miners 'fierce for learning' who, keen to continue a discussion after class, accompany him on his four-mile 'bus ride home and are happy to walk back afterwards (*ibid* 35-6); shift workers who attend their classes in the morning. A call on a librarian friend is reported as follows:

"He directed my attention to a white-haired student behind the reference-room panels. 'You see that fellow there? He is an old miner. He comes along here every day with his pencil and notebook, and he tells me that this is what he has wanted to do for the whole of his adult life, and that now, at last, the ambition is being gratified.'" (*ibid*, 45).

Dataller goes on:

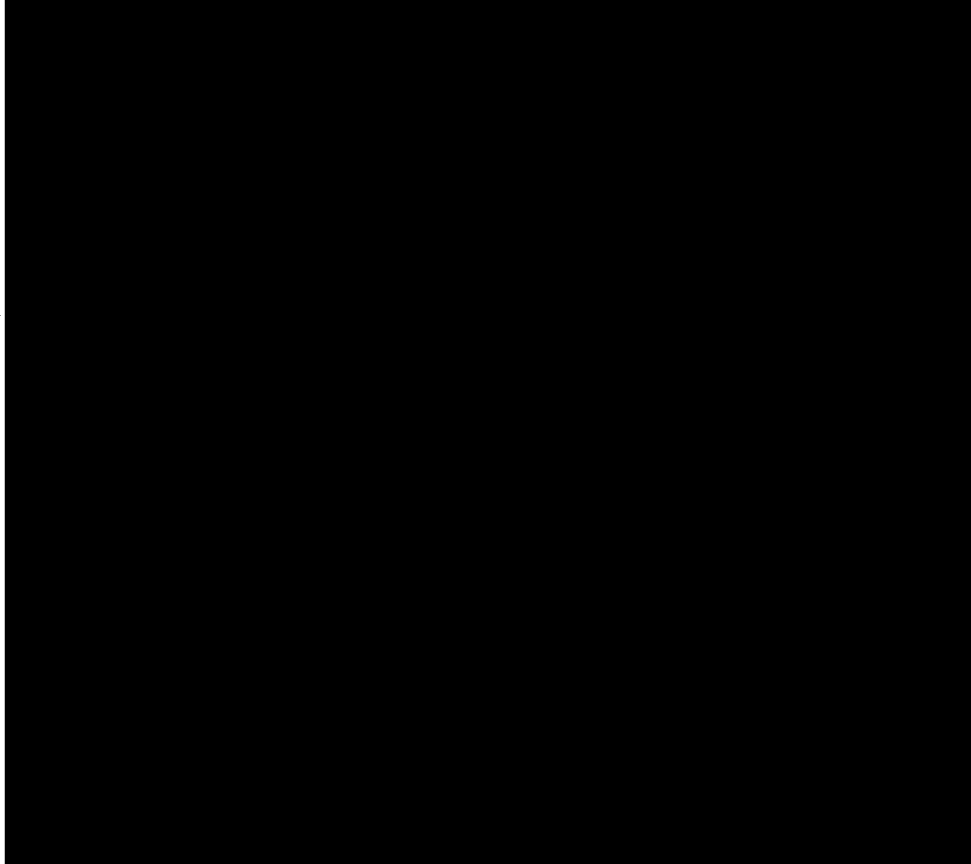
"The other day, I encountered a middle-aged miner with a family of grown-up children, who introduced himself to me in order to ask about conditions of entry into Ruskin College. Were there no scholarships - or other provision - for men of his type? I still remember the wistfulness with which he hung upon my answer."  
(45-46)

Again, and how interestingly this from half a century ago both anticipates and differs from the work of 'people's history' groups at the present:

"At E- a magazine is to be started, and a local survey attempted: the creation of a Domesday Book for the whole village, historical background, occupation, division of labour, recreational tastes, etc." (62)

The many components of Dataller's attitude towards 'working-people' emerge from a couple of passages near the end of Oxford into Coalfield. First (168-169) he explores a 'diachronic/nostalgic' version of present shortcomings:

TEXT REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



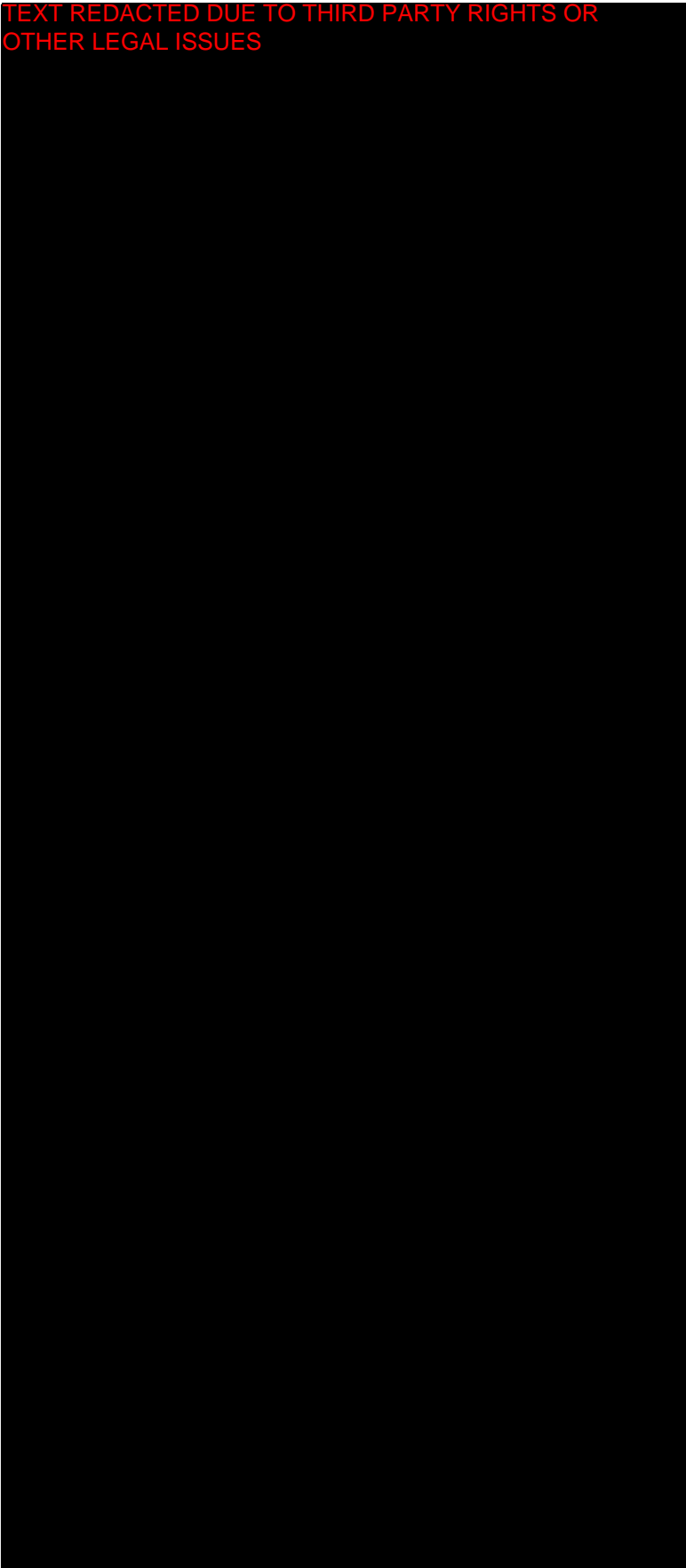
derending himself in such terms. . . . "Oxford into Coalfield 168-169

(Compare the remarks on miners and education by F Zweig (op cit, eg, Ch xx, 163).

In his final analysis he stresses potential rather than achievement and offers an explanation of what he sees as the dearth of the latter:

*Village Hampdens—and Shakespeares!*

TEXT REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR  
OTHER LEGAL ISSUES



TEXT REDACTED DUE TO THIRD PARTY RIGHTS OR  
OTHER LEGAL ISSUES

Oxford into Coalfield, 199-201

If Dataller's attitude towards his fellow miners is ambivalent his commitment remains unwavering - as is subtly affirmed (as John Field has noticed) in the final word of Oxford into Coalfield (205):

"The bus fills up at the bottom of the hill. Here of all people  
is the horsekeeper.  
He grins Broadly: 'How do?'  
'How do you do?'  
'Home again, lad?'  
'Yes!'  
'For good?'  
'Aye...'"

'Adult educational organiser'

Dataller's account of his work as 'adult educational organiser' in a mining area 'places' him more effectively than anything else and provides the basis of an illuminating contrast with practices in analogous situations in the 'third moment' (see Conclusion). Accordingly the following passage is offered here without comment as an adult/working-class education case-study and as a rich source of the particular sort of embarrassment that develops when readers, on whose sympathy/complicity the writer banks, experience a growing sense of alienation, an inability to make the evaluative response they are intended to make:

"I came to a halt upon the threshold of the billiard-room. Through a stifling smoke-haze, dim figures were perceptible - spidery cues. I could hear the low clicking of balls. There was the breath of beer. Two of the players looked towards me - and continued playing. The others gazed askance. 'What do yer want?' asked the nearest.

'I should like to see someone,' I said, adding, 'in authority.'

At once my interrogator stiffened. I think it was the word 'authority' that did it. I wear a black hat, and that, together with my dark-rimmed spectacles, may have given me a sinister appearance. The man cocked his head on his shoulder. 'Who'd we better fetch?' he asked.

'I don't know,' said one of the other players. They still eyed me closely. 'I don't know who we'd better fetch.'

'I'm interested in lectures,' I said, hastening to reassure them.

'Oh!' The first man cocked his chin vaguely. He was still distrustful. 'Wait here a minute.'

He left me, opened the door of a farther room, and presently emerged in the company of a man with greatly ruffled hair. 'Now what is it?' he asked wearily, with the attitude of a man constantly anticipating trouble. When I explained my business he nodded wisely. 'Just hang around here a minute,' he said, 'then I'll be able to talk to you. You can come in here and sit down a bit.'

I followed him into the inner room. At a table men were playing cards, and there was money scattered upon it. The others gazed at me curiously, but when their colleague rejoined them there was a whispered conversation, and the game proceeded. I waited.

At last it drew to a close, and we were at liberty to discuss business. The man with the ruffled hair ambled across chewing a cigar. 'Now's what?' he said.

'Do you think your people would be interested in lectures?'

He glanced slyly from his eye-corners. 'Lectures about what?'

'Industrial History - Literature.'

He drew the cigar from his mouth and shot a puff of smoke at the ash. He eyed the cigar, but when he spoke he addressed his colleagues at the table. 'Hey, do we want any lectures?'

'Lectures?' they repeated. They all looked across the room. And they were silent. Then one of the men said: 'Tha'd better send him up to owd Wrigly.'

'Aye, let him see owd Wrigly,' said the others.

'Tha'd better see owd Wrigly,' said the man with the cigar confidentially. 'Tha sees it's a bigger affair than ours. Tha sees?'

'I see,' I said.

It appeared that our conversation was almost exhausted, so I thanked him and he led me to the door. Then he watched me into the street. 'Tha'll be all reight wi' owd Wrigly,' he ventured reassuringly. 'Th'll find his club along yonder.'

Thus I went along to see the potent 'owd Wrigly,' and the club that 'owd Wrigly' appeared more or less to dominate...

Wrigly was apologetic. Certainly his club was fuller, finer, more thoroughly equipped than the other. There were slabs of marble and quantities of crimson plush. He had a fresh, rather florid face; but I could see that he ~~was~~ was a man with a sense of social responsibility. He stood me a drink, and we carried it to a table in the main hall, where the members were forgathering for entertainment. We might get some of the younger men, he thought, if we started with lantern lectures...

Meanwhile there was a hearty rap-rapping from the farther end of the room. It was the concert chairman clamouring for order. Then for a little while we watched a vaudeville act - a couple of young sparks in dress suits cavorting and crooning simultaneously: 'When Ah'm Walkin' Ma Baby Back Home!'

Applause thundered up, and though it appeared the most inappropriate remark at the moment: 'Now the lectures,' I said...

'Just a minute,' he said. 'We're goin' to hear these again. They're good!'

They had brought a banjo in with them this time..."

Oxford into Coalfield, 42-45

BIBLIOGRAPHYIntroductory Notes

- 1 The following bibliography is in two sections.

Part I contains primary material: texts by working-class people or including the work (or substantial testimony) of working-class people.

Part II contains other texts influencing or made use of in the study.

- 2 In respect of many 'third moment' texts their authorial collectivity means that no individual name(s) can be attached. In such cases the community publishing group is given as author.

- 3 Place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

- 4 The following abbreviations are used:

OUP - Oxford University Press  
CUP - Cambridge University Press  
RKP - Routledge & Kegan Paul

- 5 A gap is left where date of publication is unknown.



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Eyre, F	1981	<u>Kicked into Touch</u> Senior Publications
Fisher, M	1976	<u>Born One Year Before the 20th Century:</u> <u>An Oral History</u> New York: Community Documentation Workshop
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Forman, C	1978	<u>Industrial Town: Self Portrait of St</u> <u>Helens in the 1920s</u> Cameron & Taylor in association with David & Charles
Fraser, R (ed)	1968	<u>Work: Twenty Personal Accounts</u> Harmondsworth: Penguin in association with New Left Review
Fudge, D	1981	<u>The Sands of Time: the autobiography of</u> <u>Dorothy Fudge Wimborne: Word and Action</u> (Dorset)
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F W W C P	1980 - 1983	<u>Voices</u> Nos 22-30 F W W C P
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Gallagher, W	1936	<u>Revolt on the Clyde</u> Lawrence & Wishart
Garrett, G		<u>Liverpool 1921-1922</u> Liverpool: Merseyside Writers Committee
Garrett, G	1982	<u>Out of Liverpool: Stories of Sea and Land</u> Liverpool: Merseyside Writers Committee
Gasson, H	1973	<u>Firing Days: Reminiscences of a Great</u> <u>Western Fireman</u> Oxford: Oxford Publishing Co
Ginzburg, C	1980	<u>The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a</u> <u>Sixteenth-century Miller</u> RKP
Goldman, W	1940	<u>East End My Cradle</u> Faber
Gordon, I	1979	<u>Going Where the Work Is</u> Centerprise
Grafton, P	1981	<u>You, You and You: The People Out of Step</u> <u>with World War II</u> Pluto Press
Grassic Gibbon, L	1982	<u>A Scots Quair</u> Pan
Greenwood, W	1933	<u>Love on the Dole</u> Dent

Griffiths, N	1979	<u>Shops Book Brighton:</u> QueenSpark
Gullan R (Hodge, H) & Roberts, B	1937	<u>Where's that Bomb?</u> Lawrence & Wishart
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Hall, E	1977	<u>Canary Girls and Stockpots</u> Luton: Luton WEA
Hannington, W	1936	<u>Unemployed struggles, 1919-1936: My life and struggles amongst the unemployed</u> Lawrence & Wishart
Hardy, T	1832	<u>Memoir of Thomas Hardy</u> , in Vincent, Died 1977
Hareven, T K & Langenbach, R	1979	<u>Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory-City in New England</u> Methuen
Harris, H	1978	<u>Under Oars</u> Centerprise
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Harvey, R W	1976	<u>A Bristol Childhood</u> Bristol BroadSides
Haythorne, E	1981	<u>On Earth to Make the Numbers Up</u> Pontefract: Yorkshire Art Circus
Healey, B	1980	<u>Hard Times and Easy Terms: and other tales by a Queens Park Cockney</u> Brighton: Queen- Spark
Heath, B	1981	<u>M'Mam Sez</u> Nottingham: Your Own Stuff Press
Hebden Bridge WEA	1981	<u>Heptonstall Township in the Eighteenth Century</u> Hebden Bridge: Hebden Bridge WEA
Hensman, S	1979	<u>Flood at the Door</u> Centerprise
Herbert, C		<u>The Melting Pot</u> English Centre (ILEA)
Herren, L	1972	<u>Growing up Poor in London</u> Hamilton
Herling, B	1954	<u>Little and Orphan</u> Constable
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Ibekwe, S		<u>Teenage Encounters</u> Centerprise
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Jasper, A S	1974	<u>A Hoxton Childhood</u> Centerprise
Johns, A	1984	<u>Who Stood Idly By...Poems and Cartoons</u> By Alf Johns Brighton: QueenSpark
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Kochiyama, Y	1981	<u>Fishmerchant's Daughter</u> New York: Community Documentation Workshop
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